

## **Opening speech – Amb. Daniel Meron**

### **Israel CRC Interactive Dialogue – 3-4 September 2024**

Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

It is my honor to appear here today and co-head the Israeli delegation in this interactive dialogue under the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It has been a great challenge for Israel to prepare and arrange for the arrival of this delegation, while Israel is engaged in a multifront war - a war that was forced upon us on October 7th, with the worst massacre against the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Our nation is grief-stricken, and we have not awakened from this grief since October 7th.

As we sit in these halls today, 101 hostages, including two little children, Kfir and Ariel, remain in Gaza. It is inconceivable that children are taken and held as hostages. It is an unparalleled evil, and an affront to humanity and the law. As 13-year-old released hostage Hila Rotem Shoshani, described - *“life as a hostage in Gaza is not life, it is hell.”*

This weekend, we received devastating news that 6 hostages who had survived all these 11 months. They were not simple “found dead” as stated yesterday by OHCHR in Ramallah. They were executed by Hamas. They were shot in the back of their heads.

Reality for children and youth in Israel has changed completely since October 7th. The October 7th reality is that they can be yanked from their beds and dragged away by terrorists. Or their parents. Or grandparents. Or a loved one. Remembering the hostages is now a part of life – a life alongside the constant threat of terror attacks. The reality is that a parent is away for months in the

military, or that a parent was killed in duty, or wounded. It is a reality of constant sirens, of losing homes and communities.

Something that is often overlooked is that since October 7th, rockets continue to indiscriminately target the civilian population in Israel from the North and South. Over 100,000 people are still displaced from their homes and communities.

Members of the Committee,

The toll that this unwanted war has taken on children in Israel and in Gaza is tragic. Israel is dedicated to addressing the all too many hardships this war has imposed on Israeli children. At the same time, we are not indifferent to the suffering of children in Gaza. Let us remember that **Hamas terrorism is the first and foremost cause of suffering in Gaza.**

Israel has repeatedly asserted its commitment to uphold international humanitarian law, including the principles of proportionality, distinction and precautions in attack. Israel does not target civilians and is taking all feasible measures to mitigate harm to the civilian population. We are going to great lengths to facilitate the transfer of humanitarian aid to those in need. I am pleased to say that a polio vaccination campaign began this week in central Gaza, in full coordination with Israel.

**It must be stated plainly - children cannot thrive under the brutal grip of a savage terrorist regime, Hamas. A regime that teaches them that their lives are expendable.**

For nearly 20 years, since Hamas brutally took complete control of the Gaza Strip, it has turned Gaza into an unprecedented terrorist stronghold, erecting its terror infrastructure deeply within and under civilians as a matter of strategy.

The extent to which Hamas is embedded within the civilian population is clear as day and cannot be ignored.

There are tunnel shafts in children's bedrooms, weapons found under cribs, inside teddy bears, in maternity wards in hospitals. Terror tunnels are built under schools, and these facilities serve as weapons arsenals and launch sites for rockets. Children are recruited into the ranks of terrorist organizations, and when not directly taking part in hostilities, they are often used as human shields in the line of fire.

Gaza's schools under Hamas glorify martyrdom from the earliest stages of childhood. Tragically, since the year 2000, the average age of suicide bombers has been gradually declining. In 2024, 12 terrorist attacks were conducted by Palestinian youth. Incitement to hatred and terror lie at the heart of the curriculum in Gaza, perpetuating cycles of violence and anguish. This indoctrination crushes the value of life and the hope of peaceful coexistence.

For the past 20 years, Hamas has been raining rockets on Israeli cities. For the last 20 years, daily life for Israeli children living in the area surrounding Gaza, has meant constantly being aware of where the nearest shelter is located. It has meant sirens may blow off at any given time. It means growing up without a sense of security.

As stated by Janusz Korczak, a Polish educator who refused to leave his Jewish students when they were sent to the Treblinka extermination camp - ***“to reform the world – means to reform upbringing”***. We hope that Palestinian society will begin to educate their children to coexist, and to value their lives.

It is also high time that the multilateral arena takes a resolute stance against terrorism. This is key for the possibility of a better future for Israeli and Palestinian children alike.

Madam Chair,

The war against Hamas should not misguide these discussions from the purpose of discussing Israel's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child within its territory, and to assess the situation of children's rights within Israel since our last review in 2013.

Members of the Committee,

The participation of such a high-level delegation, representing various ministries, even in this difficult and complex situation, reflects the importance that Israel gives to human rights, in particular to children's rights, and to the engagement with UN mechanisms in this regard. We will do our utmost to present Israel's developments, challenges and achievements to the Committee today.

As Permanent Representative to Israel at the United Nations here in Geneva, I would like to highlight a few examples of Israel's profound work in the international arena concerning the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

In 2022, the Human Rights Council adopted by consensus, the first ever Israeli-led resolution, on the issue of countering cyberbullying against children. This phenomenon is more and more prevalent in the era of technology and social media, and which unfortunately has strong and lasting consequences on its victims. This resolution mandated the Council to hold a panel discussion on cyberbullying against children at its 53rd session, and for the Office of the High

Commissioner to prepare a report on cyberbullying against persons with disabilities. Both have been implemented.

I also take great pride in how Israeli civil society is contributing to children's rights globally. Save a Child's Heart, which received the United Nations Population Award in 2018, is an example of one such organization. Save a Child's Heart treats children suffering from heart disease who have little access to care in their own countries. The organization is dedicated to bridging the gap in access to care by training medical professionals from around the world. Some 7000 children from 70 countries were treated since 1995, half of them Palestinians. As we speak, Palestinian doctors are receiving training by this organization.

Organizations such as this are the face of Israeli society, combining inventiveness and ingenuity for the most noble purposes.

My co-head of delegation, the Director General of the Ministry of Justice will provide an overview of national developments in the field of children's rights.

Chair,

I would like to take this opportunity to present my co-head of delegation, Mr. Itamar Donenfeld, the Director General of the Ministry of Justice.

Among the Ministries present in this room or virtually, are:

- the Ministry of Justice, including the Department of Legislation and Legal Counsel, and the Governmental Coordination Unit for Youth and Children's Rights;
- the Ministry of Education;
- the Military Advocate General Unit at the Israel Defense Forces;
- the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs;

- the Ministry of Health;
- and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including members of our Permanent Mission in Geneva.

In the interest of time, the representatives will introduce themselves before they speak.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the preparations for this interactive dialogue, and everyone who has come to Geneva during this difficult time.

On behalf of the Israeli delegation, I welcome this opportunity to engage with this Committee on Israel's efforts, experiences, views, achievements and challenges, in implementing its obligations under this Convention.

On a personal note, I will add that we all pray that better times are ahead for our region. This is our genuine prayer.

Before I turn over to my co-head of delegation, I will add that Israel maintains that Human Rights Conventions apply only within territories in which a State applies its sovereignty. Such is the case with the CRC. In line with basic principles of treaty interpretation, Israel believes that the Convention, does not apply, nor was it intended to apply, to areas beyond a State's national territory. In the current state of international law and state-practice worldwide, it is Israel's view that the Law of Armed Conflict and Human Rights Law, which are codified in separate instruments, remain distinct and apply in different circumstances. The Law of Armed Conflict is the relevant and specific applicable body of law in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

I will now turn over to my co-head of the delegation, the Director General of the Ministry of Justice.