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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Increased Israeli Violence against Palestinian Children Since October 7th 2023

Increased Violence against Palestinian Children Since October 7th in Gaza:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance. This is reaffirmed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which specifies and details the international standards for children's rights. Palestinian children living under Israeli military occupation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip are routinely denied their right to life, right to education, right to adequate housing, and are denied access to healthcare, among other rights denials inherent in a decades-long Israeli military occupation with no end in sight.¹

However since October 7th 2023, Palestinian children have not only been denied these fundamental human rights, rather instead, have been the sole target of the Israeli government's onslaught of Gaza. In direct violation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Palestinian children have been subject to an insurmountable increase of violence by Israeli forces. Schools, children's hospital wards, as well as children merely walking to seek water, food or other forms of sustenance, have been targeted by Israeli airstrikes, and live ammunition.

At the time of writing, over 12,000+ Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza since October 7th alone, with thousands more becoming amputees and succumbing life altering injuries.² UNICEF, the UN's children's fund, estimates that minors account for at least 40% of the estimated 20,000 people killed so far.

"When we speak of a war on children, it's not to try to be dramatic. It's rooted in the data," said James Elder, UNICEF's chief spokesperson, who spent weeks in Gaza under bombardment. "In 'normal' past conflicts, the rate was about 20%, so you're looking at twice the number of children who have been killed and injured compared with previous conflicts."³

At least 17,000 children in the Gaza Strip have been left unaccompanied or separated from their families nearly four months into Israel's assault on the enclave, the United Nations children's agency estimates. Nearly all children in the strip also require mental health support, according to UNICEF.⁴

Israel's attack on Al-Nasr Medical Center is yet another example of how Palestinian children are not merely 'collateral damage' as Israeli authorities routinely proclaim, but are in fact the intended targets of their violence. On November 9, Israeli airstrikes hit Al-Nasr Medical Center in Gaza City, cutting off the neonatal intensive care unit's oxygen supply. The attack forced staff to evacuate the next day, leaving babies that could not be transported alone in intensive care, according to Doctors Without Borders, with Palestinian premature babies dying as a result. Israel has repeatedly forced maternity wards and reproductive health clinics to shut down or relocate.⁵

Israel has cut electricity to Gaza and banned the entry of fuel needed to run generators that powered hospital equipment like incubators, despite World Health Organization (WHO) warnings that newborns would die. An act of outright violence on Palestinian children upon taking even their very first breath. Additionally Israeli military operations forced the maternity ward of Gaza's main hospital, al-Shifa, to evacuate to Al-Helou International Hospital, originally a cancer facility. An Israeli shell later struck al-Helou, according to the WHO. Without electricity for incubators, five premature babies died at al-Shifa before survivors were evacuated on November 19, according to the United Nations.⁵

Palestinian children of all ages are under attack by Israeli forces in Gaza. Palestinian schools had to end their academic year early due to the violence, with nearly all schools in the strips becoming shelters for women and children who have had their homes destroyed by Israeli airstrikes. A vast number of these schools have been attacked, and are still being attacked by Israeli forces, despite them being all densely populated by Palestinian children.

Al-Jazeera claims it has obtained exclusive video and images showing bodies piled up inside the Shadia Abu Ghazala School in the al-Faluja area, west of the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. On 13 December, Al-Jazeera said a number of people including women, children and babies were killed execution-style by Israeli forces while sheltering inside the school, according to witnesses.⁶ This act of barbarity strenuously demonstrates that Palestinian children are being specifically targeted by Israeli violence.

Increased Violence against Palestinian Children Since October 7th in the West Bank:

Israeli forces violence has also increased toward Palestinian children living in the occupied West Bank. UNICEF released a devastating report highlighting this violence on 28/12/2023, stating that “2023 has been the deadliest year on record for children in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with conflict-related violence reaching unprecedented levels. “83 children have been killed in the past twelve weeks – more than double the number of children killed in all of 2022, amid increased military and law enforcement operations. More than 576 have been injured and others have reportedly been detained. Furthermore, the West Bank has been heavily affected by movement and access restrictions.

“As the world watches on in horror at the situation in the Gaza Strip, children in the West Bank are experiencing a nightmare of their own. Many children report that fear has become a part of their daily life, with many scared even walking to school or playing outside due to the threat of shootings and other conflict-related violence. UNICEF is extremely concerned about the right of children in the West Bank including East Jerusalem to safety and protection, and their inherent right to life.

“The suffering of children in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, must not fade into the background of the current conflict – it is part of it.”⁷

Israeli authorities have also rampantly increased its arrests of Palestinian children in the West Bank since October 7th. Approximately over 200 children have been arrested since October 7th.⁸ Israeli forces systematically arrest Palestinian children as part of punitive collective detention campaigns. These detained children are subjected to various forms of psychological and physical torture, without respecting the necessary child protection measures. Israeli forces exploit the arrest of children to blackmail their families, forcing them to pay high financial fines for their release. The process of arresting children leaves devastating effects on their mental and physical health. The Israeli forces began conducting continuous arrest campaigns since October 7th, targeting various segments of the Palestinian population in the West Bank provinces as a form of collective punishment and oppressive policies.

Since October 7th, a new Israeli policy has emerged of using children in Palestinian villages and cities in the West Bank as hostages to pressure their relatives into surrendering themselves to the occupying forces amid ongoing arrest campaigns. The occupation detains and arrests children, threatening their families with them to coerce them into surrendering themselves. One of the cases documented by prisoner support organizations involved a child (M.N.), three years old, where Israeli forces stormed the family's house and detained him to pressure his father to surrender himself for over an hour and a half.⁸

Conclusion:

The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) expresses grave concern over the increasing number of child casualties and strongly urges the Israeli government to adhere to international laws and take immediate steps to prevent any more harm to all civilians, especially children. Intentionally targeting and causing harm to civilians constitutes a war crime, and international humanitarian law places a definite responsibility on all sides in a conflict to safeguard the lives of civilians who are impacted by the ongoing hostilities.

The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd (PRC) would like to highlight that in 1991, Israel ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which stipulates that children should only be deprived of their liberty as a measure of last resort, must not be unlawfully or arbitrarily detained, and must not be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Finally, the Palestinian Return Centre Ltd condemns the abhorrent violence the Israeli Occupation inflicts on Palestinian children on a daily basis, and especially that violence that has intensified since October 7th. We call upon the international community to demand the Israeli Occupation forces do not put Palestinian children in harm's way.

5 Human Rights Watch: Birth and Death Intertwined in Gaza Strip. Hrw.org. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/01/birth-and-death-intertwined-gaza-strip#:~:text=On%20November%209%2C%20Israeli%20airstrikes,according%20to%20Doctors%20Without%20Borders.>

7 UNICEF: Number of children killed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, reaches unprecedented levels. Unicef.org. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/number-children-killed-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem-reaches-unprecedented>