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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.

[2 February 2025]

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



## **A Generation in Peril: The Human Cost of War on Gaza's Children After October, 7th 2023**

### **Introduction:**

The most recent conflict in Gaza, which lasted for over 15 months before a ceasefire was reached on January 19, 2025, has inflicted catastrophic damage on the civilian population, particularly children. According to various humanitarian reports, the toll on children has been unconscionable, with more than 14,500 children reported killed and thousands more injured.<sup>(1)</sup> The violence and destruction have not only taken lives but have also inflicted lasting psychological and physical trauma on Gaza's youth, marking them as the most vulnerable victims in this ongoing humanitarian crisis. Schools, hospitals, and homes have been destroyed or severely damaged, leaving children without safe spaces to learn, play, or heal.

This report, prepared by the Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, aims to shed light on the grave violations of children's rights during the latest Israeli military operations in Gaza, assess their long-term implications, and offer recommendations to ensure that children's rights are upheld.

### **Death and Injury:**

The most direct and harrowing impact of the war on children has been the loss of life. As per various reports, including those from Save the Children and UNICEF, over 14,500 children have been killed in the Gaza Strip during this conflict, among more than 45,000 people killed in the enclave in the last 15 months, with many more suffering life-altering injuries.<sup>(2)</sup> The Israeli military's airstrikes, shelling, and ground operations have claimed countless young lives, often with entire families being wiped out in a single strike.

The use of explosive weapons and internationally-prohibited bombs in densely populated areas has disproportionately affected children, who are especially vulnerable to injuries resulting from such attacks. The strikes have caused horrific burns, amputations, concussions, and other severe trauma, with many children left with lifelong physical and psychological scars.

The use of explosive weapons in Gaza in 2024 condemned an average of 475 children each month – or 15 children a day – to potentially lifelong disabilities, including severely injured limbs and hearing impairments, said Save the Children.<sup>(3)</sup>

### **Family Loss and Shattered Childhood:**

The war in Gaza has not only torn apart homes but has also shattered the very fabric of Palestinian families. For children, the loss of a parent or caregiver is one of the most devastating consequences of the ongoing conflict. Thousands of children in Gaza have experienced the trauma of losing their mothers, fathers, and other close family members, leaving them without the emotional and physical support needed to cope with such immense loss. These children are left to navigate their grief in an environment where safety is fleeting, and basic human needs are scarce.

A significant number of children have been separated from their families, either due to the bombing of their homes or in the chaos of fleeing for safety. Over 17,000 children are estimated to be without parents or family members in Gaza.<sup>(4)</sup>

Even before Israel's current war, there was a staggeringly high number of orphaned children in Gaza - 33,000 - from five previous military offensives since 2008.<sup>(5)</sup>

According to the latest reports, the death toll of civilians, including parents, continues to rise exponentially, with many bodies found dead under the rubble of destroyed homes, leaving behind a generation of orphans who face the compounded challenges of displacement, malnutrition, and psychological trauma.

## **Protracted Displacement:**

The scale of displacement in Gaza has been staggering. Children have been forced to leave their homes, sometimes repeatedly, to seek shelter in already overcrowded and unsafe areas. Forced to live in temporary shelters such as tents, often with limited access to basic needs like food, water, and sanitation, children are vulnerable to a range of diseases and malnutrition. The destruction of hospitals, clinics, and health centres has further exacerbated the situation, leaving children without access to critical health care services, including vaccinations, medical treatment, and nutritional support.

Living in displacement has not only exposed children to physical dangers but has also subjected them to severe emotional and mental distress. The loss of their homes, possessions, and loved ones, combined with the ongoing insecurity and lack of stability, has caused widespread psychological trauma. Many children have experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including anxiety, nightmares, depression, and an overwhelming sense of fear. Caregivers report that 96% of children feel death is imminent, and nearly half believe they will die because of the war.<sup>(6)</sup>

The displacement has also disrupted their education, leaving an entire generation of children without the opportunity to go to school or receive an education, further jeopardizing their future prospects.

The winter months have been particularly harsh, with many children enduring cold, wet conditions in makeshift shelters. Without adequate shelter, clothing, or warmth, children are highly susceptible to diseases such as pneumonia and other cold-related illnesses. Furthermore, these displaced children face malnutrition, as the enclave has been subjected to a severe blockade, making it increasingly difficult for humanitarian aid to reach those in need.

## **Trauma and Psychological Impact:**

The long-term impact of these violations on Gaza's children cannot be overstated. With entire families torn apart, children deprived of their education, and a generation traumatized by violence, the future of Gaza's youth is uncertain. These children are at risk of lifelong physical disabilities, emotional scars, and a diminished sense of hope for the future. The psychological toll on children in Gaza will likely continue for years to come, affecting their mental health, academic performance, and overall development.

Today, children in Gaza are experiencing extreme levels of psychological trauma as a result of continuous bombings, displacement, and the loss of family members. Many children have witnessed their homes and neighborhoods reduced to rubble, and some have been forced to witness the deaths of their loved ones. According to the UN's humanitarian affairs chief, over 1 million children in Gaza are in urgent need of mental health and psychosocial support due to trauma, anxiety, and depression. A significant number of these children have expressed suicidal thoughts, underlining the severity of their mental anguish.<sup>(7)</sup> More than 2 million children in Gaza are currently unable to attend school, and the psychological burden on them makes returning to education difficult, even when facilities are eventually restored.

## **Recommendations:**

Given the ongoing crisis and the severe violations of children's rights in Gaza, the Palestinian Return Centre Ltd calls for:

### **1. Securing a Permanent Ceasefire and Ensuring the Protection of Children and All Civilians in Gaza:**

The international community must hold all parties accountable for violations of international law and ensure that hostilities do not resume.

## **2. Allowing Unrestricted Humanitarian Access:**

The international community must work to guarantee the safe, unrestricted flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza. This includes food, medical supplies, and psychological support to address the immediate and long-term needs of children.

## **3. Providing Psychosocial Support and Rehabilitation:**

Mental health and psychosocial support services must be rapidly scaled up to address the widespread trauma affecting Gaza's children. Specialized programs should be implemented to support children's recovery, including those who have lost family members or been injured during the conflict.

## **4. Prioritization of Reconstruction of Education and Critical Health Infrastructure:**

Serious action should be taken to ensure that children can return to school in a safe and supportive environment, which is essential for their development and future prospects.

## **5. Accountability for Violations**

Accountability for violations of children's rights, including the targeting of civilian infrastructure and the indiscriminate use of force, must be pursued through international legal mechanisms. Israel's military actions should be scrutinized, and those responsible for crimes against children must be held accountable.

## **Conclusion:**

The latest war in Gaza has caused immense suffering for children, leaving them with deep physical and emotional scars. The international community has a moral responsibility to ensure that the rights of Gaza's children are upheld and protected in accordance with international law. The Israeli blockade on Gaza must be lifted, allowing for the free flow of people, goods, and services. This will enable the people of Gaza, especially children, to access the resources they need for survival and recovery.

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(1) <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/children-gaza-need-lifesaving-support>

(2) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/12/1158206>

(3) <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/gaza-explosive-weapons-left-15-children-day-potentially-lifelong-disabilities-2024>

(4) <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/a-generation-has-been-traumatized-says-humanitarian-affairs-chief-briefing-security-council-on-plight-of-children-in-gaza-press-release/#:~:text=Citing%20conservative%20estimates%20indicating%20that,desperate%20need%20of%20health%20services.>

(6) <https://www.warchild.net/news/new-study-gaza-children-psychological-toll/>

(7) <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc15975.doc.htm>