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## Human Rights Council

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**Human rights situation in Palestine and other  
occupied Arab territories**

### **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.

[27 May 2025]

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



## **Gaza's Lost Childhood: The Catastrophic Impact of Conflict on Children**

### **Overview:**

Gaza is now the most dangerous place on Earth to be a child. Since October 7, 2023, Israel's ongoing assault has created a humanitarian catastrophe, striking Gaza's children with unprecedented brutality.

By May 2025, over 18,000 Palestinian children had been killed—more than 40% of civilian casualties—amounting to one child every 10 minutes. Thousands more have been severely injured, with hundreds undergoing amputations, often without anesthesia due to the collapsed health system.

Surviving children face trauma, malnutrition, and loss of access to clean water, shelter, and education.

This is not a tragedy but a deliberate, systematic destruction of a generation. These violations breach international humanitarian and human rights law.

This factsheet presents verified data and testimonies from PRC, UN agencies, and human rights organizations, calling for urgent international action to end the killing and protect children's rights.

### **Massive Child Casualties and Disappearances:**

- More than 18,000 children have been killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, including 274 newborn babies and 876 infants below the age of one year.
- Among those killed 15,700 have been identified.
- More than 4,000 others are presumed dead under rubble.
- 17 children froze to death in displacement tents.(1)
- Since early March, at least 57 children are reported to have died from starvation and systematic malnutrition.
- According to a UN-backed Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) assessment, more than 93 percent of children in Gaza, or about 930,000, are at risk of famine.(2)
- Approximately 17,000 children are unaccompanied or separated from their children and families.(3)
- According to the most recent updates by UN agencies, 660,000 children in Gaza are still out of school, as 90% of schools in the Strip are destroyed.(4)

### **Alarming Rates of Amputations and Injuries:**

So far, Gaza has the highest number of child amputees per capita and has been rendered incapable of taking care of them.

According to the World Health Organization, as of September 2024, 22,500 people in Gaza had sustained life-altering injuries since October 7, 2023, including severe limb injuries, amputations, spinal cord trauma, traumatic brain injuries and major burns.(5)

More than 10 children were losing one or two limbs every day in Gaza. Many were undergoing the operation without anesthesia and many of these limbs could have been saved had the healthcare system not been completely decimated.(6)

The World Health Organization estimates that at least a quarter of those injured in Gaza have life-changing injuries, requiring major rehabilitation.

More than 26,000 children have been injured, with thousands requiring major rehabilitation due to severe injuries such as burns, spinal injuries, and amputations.(7)

According to WHO, between 3,105 and 4,050 limb amputations have occurred since October 2023.

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, according to Save the Children.(8)

These estimates are likely low and may not capture all children left with hearing or visual impairments due to war-related injuries. They also do not capture children suffering potentially lifelong psychological injuries as a result of traumatic incidents they have witnessed or experienced during the war.

### **Educational Disruption and School Destruction:**

Gaza's education sector has been devastated by Israel's ongoing military assault. According to UNRWA, over 660,000 students have been forced out of school since October 2023, including those in public schools and the 288 UNRWA-run facilities.(9)

At least 95% of Gaza's educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed, including schools used as overcrowded shelters for displaced families. Some were bombed while children were inside seeking refuge.

These attacks violate international humanitarian law and have denied Palestinian children their right to education. PRC warns that rebuilding could take years, placing an entire generation at risk of lasting illiteracy, exclusion, and psychological trauma.

The halt in schooling has already led to increased child labor, early marriage, and mental health decline. Makeshift education efforts are hindered by unsafe conditions, lack of teachers, materials, and electricity.

UNESCO has called Gaza's situation one of the world's worst education crises, urging urgent global action to protect and restore learning for hundreds of thousands of children.

### **Orphaned and Unaccompanied Children:**

The Gaza Strip is suffering from the largest orphan crisis in modern history.

Nearly 40,000 children in Gaza have lost one or both parents since the beginning of Israel's ongoing military offensive on the blockaded enclave.

According to a statement of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics released on the eve of Palestinian Children's Day, the war has left 39,384 children orphaned, as Gaza continues to suffer immense devastation and widespread displacement affecting the majority of its 2.3 million residents.(10)

Approximately 18,000 children are unaccompanied, facing heightened risks of exploitation and abuse.

An estimated 150,000 pregnant women and new mothers are now in desperate need of health services.(11)

### **Detention, Displacement, and Malnutrition:**

Field reports indicate that at least 200 children have been detained by Israeli forces, with many transferred out of Gaza.

The majority of Gaza's 2.3 million population has been displaced, exacerbating the vulnerability of children.

Children are living in tragic conditions, with many forced to take refuge in torn tents or destroyed homes, in a near-total absence of social care and psychological support

UNICEF and WFP have warned of a looming catastrophe as 71,000 children and more than 17,000 mothers are threatened by acute malnutrition.(12)

Right now, over 96% of women and children in Gaza cannot meet their basic nutritional needs. Most are surviving on rationed flour, lentils, pasta, and canned food—a diet that slowly compromises their health.

### **Psychological Trauma and Mental Health Crisis:**

Prior to the conflict, 500,000 children required psychological support; this number has now doubled to approximately one million.(13)

Children are experiencing extreme levels of anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and depression due to continuous exposure to violence and instability.

Children are undergoing surgeries, including amputations, without adequate anesthesia due to severe shortages.

“A generation has been traumatized,” Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, told the Security Council in late January 2025, pointing to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) finding that 1 million children need mental health and psychosocial support for depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts.(14)

“Children have been killed, starved and frozen to death,” he said, adding: “Some died before their first breath — perishing with their mothers in childbirth.”

### **Call to Action:**

The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) urges the United Nations Human Rights Council, Member States, and international bodies to take immediate and sustained action to protect the rights of children in Gaza. The scale of destruction and systematic targeting of children and civilian infrastructure demand a principled, rights-based response and urgent accountability.

#### **1. Immediate and Unconditional Ceasefire**

A full and unconditional ceasefire must be enforced without delay to end the killing and maiming of children and enable urgent humanitarian relief.

#### **2. Full Humanitarian Access**

All parties must guarantee safe, unhindered access for humanitarian actors to deliver essential aid— including food, water, medical supplies, and education materials— in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 2417 and 2286 and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

#### **3. Protection of Schools and Hospitals**

Educational and medical facilities must be protected as civilian objects under international humanitarian law, including UNSC Resolution 2601 (2021). Deliberate attacks should be investigated as possible war crimes.

#### 4. Investigation and Accountability

Grave violations must be independently investigated by international mechanisms, including the ICC and the UN Commission of Inquiry— particularly unlawful killings, displacement, and starvation as a method of war.

#### 5. Support for Orphans and Psychosocial Rehabilitation

Support is urgently needed for over 40,000 orphaned children and thousands of wounded and traumatized minors. This includes psychosocial care, family reunification, and rehabilitation, as outlined in Articles 6, 9, 24, 27, and 39 of the CRC.

#### 6. Immediate Release of Detained Children

All Palestinian children in Israeli detention must be released immediately, in accordance with Article 37 of the CRC, which prohibits arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of children.

#### 7. Rebuilding Gaza's Education System

The international community must support the reconstruction of Gaza's education sector, ensuring safe learning environments, trained teachers, and protection for students and staff, as per the Safe Schools Declaration.

#### 8. Child-Centered Reconstruction Policies

Reconstruction must be child-focused and inclusive, involving affected children and communities in decisions that shape their futures, in line with Article 12 of the CRC.

#### 9. Preventing Future Violations

Sustained measures are needed to prevent recurrence, including arms embargoes, diplomatic pressure, and sanctions on actors responsible for violating children's rights in the occupied Palestinian territories.

(1) <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=5965>

(2) <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1159596/>

(3) [https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2025-](https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/UASC%20in%20Gaza%20%28Complete%20Report%29_1.pdf)

[01/UASC%20in%20Gaza%20%28Complete%20Report%29\\_1.pdf](https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/UASC%20in%20Gaza%20%28Complete%20Report%29_1.pdf)

(4) <https://www.unicef.org/media/166061/file/2025-HAC-State-of-Palestine.pdf>

(5) <https://operationalsupport.un.org/en/over-22500-have-suffered-life-changing-injuries-gaza-who>

(6) <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/gaza-more-10-children-day-lose-limb-three-months-brutal-conflict>

(7) <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=5880>

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

(9) <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-168-situation-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem>

(10) <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=5965>

(11) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1155391>

(12) <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/risk-famine-children-across-gaza-new-report-says>

(13) <https://news.un.org/en/gallery/1146372#:~:text=Symptoms%20include%20extremely%20high%20levels,time%20they%20hear%20the%20bombings.&text=Before%20this%20war%2C%20more%20than,support%20in%20the%20Gaza%20Strip.>

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