



What we do in the occupied Palestinian territory

- We're protecting children from violence and abuse
- We're advocating for children's rights
- We're reducing violence in schools
- We're responding to emergency needs in Gaza



The occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) – the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza – has experienced conflict for more than 60 years. It has created the world's largest refugee population, an estimated 4.448 million people. Many of them live in exile, often in overcrowded camps. Just over half the population of the OPT – 3.761 million – are under 18. And 42% of Palestinian children in the OPT are refugees. Poverty, conflict, violence and fear are a daily reality for many children and their families. Last year, 80% of Palestinian refugees in the OPT were living below the poverty line (compared to 20% in 2000).

Many Palestinians have now lost all hope for the future. Palestinian groups remain armed and active and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory continues. Lives are still being lost; in the first three months of 2008, 40 children were killed – that's more than in the whole of 2007. And families are living under extreme hardship. **One in three families can't afford a balanced meal**, as there have been steep rises in the price of wheat flour (57%) and vegetables (40%). There's a shortage of clean water, and lack of resources means there's limited access to healthcare or quality education.

The situation has become even worse since the Israeli government imposed severe restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from Gaza in response to the Hamas takeover in June 2007 and ongoing indiscriminate rocket attacks against Israel. A truce was agreed between Israel and Hamas in June 2008, although it may not lead to much improvement in people's everyday living conditions.

Save the Children in the occupied Palestinian territory

We focus on protecting children in their schools, homes and communities, and promoting children's rights through advocacy work, capacity building and publications. We work with the Palestinian Authority (PA) – mainly the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Child Rights Planning Unit at the Ministry of Planning – Palestinian and Israeli NGOs and other international agencies (including the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA). We also provide emergency support to children and their families in Gaza.

Our involvement dates back to 1949, when we began providing health services to Palestinian refugees living in camps in Lebanon following the exodus of Palestinians from the newly created state of Israel. After the PA was set up in 1994, we increased our support for partner organisations, focusing on technical assistance in health and education. We established a full-time presence in the OPT in 2002 and a separate country programme in 2007.

Key areas of work

We're protecting children from violence and abuse

Palestinian children have borne the brunt of the conflict, and experience violence on a daily basis in their homes, schools and communities. Since the beginning of the second uprising in September 2000, 940 children have been killed as a consequence of the conflict with Israel. Hundreds of others have been maimed or left with permanent disabilities. In 2007, approximately 700 children were arrested by Israeli authorities. On 31 January 2008, 322 children were being held in Israeli jails, including 18 children held in administrative detention without charge or trial. The denial of humanitarian access as a result of the Israeli blockade has directly affected many thousands of children.

We're working to make children safer in their homes, schools and communities. We're helping to protect children's rights in three ways: we're empowering children to engage with and influence those in a position to change things; we're building national and local systems to monitor and document violations of children's rights; and we're strengthening the ability of the PA to report on their obligations to protect children. Our activities will benefit at least 27,000 children directly and up to 795,000 (35% of all children in OPT) indirectly by 2011.

We're providing financial and technical support to help the PA produce a comprehensive report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that includes a budget analysis – how much is spent on children, and where. We'll get 2,500 children actively involved in the PA's reporting to the UN Committee. Our Children as Social Actors project helped 300 children advocate for their own and other children's rights. And working with three Palestinian NGOs – Ma'an Development Centre, the Young Men's Christian Association and the Civic Forum Institute – we've held workshops for staff on ways to improve children's participation.

We're advocating for children's rights

Palestinian children in the OPT don't have the benefit of a state to uphold their rights or ensure their wellbeing. Monitoring and documentation of abuses of children's rights is weak. We're working with all those who have a responsibility to protect children – families, schools, communities, the Palestinian Authority, the UN and other international organisations, and local Palestinian organisations – to help them fulfil their commitments to children.

Through our advocacy work and publications, we're promoting key child protection issues and making sure that the voices of children are heard in the media and brought to the attention of world leaders. We've produced factsheets, case studies and high-profile reports such as *The Gaza Strip: A humanitarian implosion* (published in March 2008) and the diary of one of our staff in Gaza, Rana Elhindi, was posted on the BBC website. We also produce a quarterly *Child Rights Monitor* with updates and recommendations for action.

Working closely with UNICEF and Defence for Children International, we've set up a 1612 Working Group (the number of a key UN Security Council resolution). The group collects reliable information on the most serious violations against children. Next year we'll train 30 staff from local human rights monitoring agencies in child participation and protection, children's rights, and monitoring and documentation skills to strengthen the evidence base for international action. Over the next three years, 7,500 children will benefit directly from our advocacy work, and up to 95,000 children will benefit indirectly through the dissemination of information on children's rights and improved national monitoring systems.

We're reducing violence in schools

Although enrolment rates are generally high in the OPT, the quality of education is poor because of the deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation. Violence, overcrowding and poverty make it difficult for children to do well in school. More than two-thirds of Gaza's UNRWA school students from grades 4–9 failed maths last year, and more than one-third did poorly in Arabic. Children are often prevented from attending school because of curfews, checkpoints and other movement restrictions. Even when they do go, they face a difficult learning environment, as tension and frustration often erupts into violence and disrupts relationships with teachers, concentration, opportunities for play and social interaction.

Working closely with the Tamer Institute for Community Education, we're reducing violence in schools by building a 'protective sphere' for children in 15 PA-run schools (six in Gaza and nine in the West Bank). Through this EC-funded project, we support 600 children aged 6–8 and 12–15. We're working with schools, teachers and parents to develop alternatives to corporal punishment, and giving children and young people the skills to play an active role in decisions that affect them. We're also helping young people find alternative forms of behaviour to violence, even though it's a common occurrence in their everyday lives.

Activities include setting up school-based education committees in each of the 15 schools and training teachers, parents and others so that they can work together to make children's

lives safer. We run workshops with teachers on effective classroom management and children's rights. In October 2007 we organised a day of action against violence against children. Children from the project expressed their concerns through drama, songs and discussion sessions with adults from their communities. We plan to extend this project to UNRWA schools over the next two years. And we'll continue to work with the PA Ministry of Education and Higher Education to address violence in schools, developing and rolling out its no-tolerance policy.

We're responding to emergency needs

Life for the 1.387 million Palestinians in Gaza is now worse than it's ever been. The blockade and the collapse of the economy mean there's not much food to buy and people don't have much money to buy it with (unemployment is close to 40%). Over 1.1 million people in Gaza are now dependent on food aid. Medical supplies can't get in, and patients needing life-saving treatment can't get out. At least 13 children died between October 2007 and July 2008 because they couldn't get treatment outside Gaza. Water and sanitation facilities are under severe strain, and the West Bank in particular is facing grave water shortages, with serious implications for public health. We're completing an assessment of children's needs in Gaza. We'll continue to monitor and document the effects of the blockade on children, focusing on access to healthcare and education.

Our emergency response in Gaza is as part of the International Save the Children Alliance. In 2007, we rehabilitated three community centres in Beit Hanoun that were damaged during an Israeli attack, benefiting more than 3,800 children and young people. In February 2008, as a result of the deteriorating security situation, we provided the Gaza Coastal Water Utility (responsible for water and waste water treatment) with a portable fuel tank, a portable water tank and safety equipment and clothing for its staff. The fuel tank will be used to transfer fuel to around 200 water and waste water treatment plants on a daily basis. The water tank can supply around 1,000 people with 10 litres of water per person each day. And we're distributing emergency kits and education packs to 1,500 of the most vulnerable children, including those whose families have lost their homes through demolitions.

Our research has found that these families have particular protection needs and we've set up a working group to respond to them. With the Palestine Red Crescent Society, we've also run training sessions and provided first aid kits for 75 women in Gaza's north buffer zones.



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