



Children outside a community youth center and participating in Save the Children Protective Spheres programme activities in northern Gaza, April 2008

VIOLATIONS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PROTECTION

For Palestinian children, there is no safe haven from **physical harm** as a result of conflict. Since 2000, between 50 and 200 children have been killed every year in the OPT. This trend continued in 2008:

- During 2008, 127 Palestinian children and four Israeli children were killed due to the Israeli Palestinian conflict (OCHA, OCHA, Al Mezan).
- These compare to a total of 43 Palestinian children killed during 2007 and 127 killed in 2006. No Israeli children were killed in 2007 and two were killed in 2006 (OCHA).
- During 2008, an additional 11 Palestinian children were killed as a result of Palestinian factional violence (OCHA).
- Also in 2008, some 1,166 Palestinian children (807 in Gaza, 359 in the West Bank) and 13 Israeli children were injured (7 in Israel, 6 in the OPT) as a result of the Israeli Palestinian conflict (OCHA, 4).
- During 2008, there were at least 23 reported attacks on Palestinian schools – of which 12 were perpetrated by the Israeli military, five by Israeli settlers, five by unknown gunmen and one by a Palestinian faction. Additionally, 34 schools were damaged in Gaza during the final days of December².
- In the OPT, every year it is estimated that some 2,500 births encounter obstacles en route to delivery (OHCHR); in 2008 at least four Palestinian women were forced to give birth at Israeli barriers or checkpoints in the West Bank (OHCHR, OCHA).
- From January through October 2008, at least nine Palestinian children died following delayed or denied access to specialized medical services outside of Gaza (WHO).

In an environment of high levels of stress for children and parents, as well as poverty and poorly developed child protection services, **violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse** are all serious concerns for children in the OPT. While reliable and up to date information on these phenomena is scarce, the research available indicates high levels of violence against children from family at home, teachers at school, and peers in their daily lives. Early marriage and child labour are also pressing concerns for children.

- A 2006 study found that 25% of boys and 22% of girls had experienced sexual abuse. More than one in two girls suffered from sexual harassment (Save the Children Sweden).
- By the time they are 18 years of age, 19% of girls are married and 10% are either pregnant or are already mothers (UNICEF, UNICEF).

In the OPT, children may be separated from their families by death or displacement, but perhaps the main cause of **family separation** is the arrest and detention of Palestinian children by Israeli military authorities (see detention and abuse section below).

The **recruitment and use** of children by armed forces and armed groups is a controversial issue, and it is difficult to monitor. In the past, there have been reports of Palestinian children in the OPT being used as informants and as human shields by Israeli soldiers (HRW). There have also been reports of soldiers and parents encouraging settler children under 12 (who are below the age of criminal accountability) to commit acts of violence against Palestinians (OCHA). In Gaza, anecdotal evidence has suggested that military training has taken place in Palestinian summer camps (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers).

In the OPT, children and their families suffer significant **psychological distress** from their daily encounters with conflict, combined with the pressures of poverty and restrictions on their freedom of movement.

- In a 2007 study in the Ramallah district, Palestinian students reported the lowest life-satisfaction scores compared with 35 other countries⁵.
- A 2008 study of children in Gaza showed that 73.8% experienced worry, 54.8% felt depressed, 52.9% felt sad, 53.7% were afraid to be alone, and 53.2% complained of headaches (Gaza Community Mental Health Programme).

Children need a better protection system in society. We need to discuss and solve problems democratically in the family. We also need more protection at school. Sometimes it's the [Israeli] soldiers who make us feel unsafe. At other times, it's the (local) boys who enter the school and vandalize its property.
Shouruq, 13, Azzun, West Bank.

⁴ Information is put together from reports produced by the Israel/OPT informal Working Group on Security Council Resolution 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict, which includes: UNICEF, UNOCHA, UNRWA, OHCHR, WHO, B'Tselem, DCI/PS and SCUK.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Giacaman R, Shannon H, Saab H, Arya N, Boyce W. Individual and collective exposure to political violence: Palestinian adolescents coping with conflict. Eur J Public Health 2007; 17:361-68.



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Detention and Abuse

One of the more serious rights violations for children in the OPT is the arrest, detention and (frequent) abuse that thousands of Palestinian children have suffered in the Israeli military judicial system (DCI/PS). The lack of a juvenile justice system has meant that, among other violations, children were routinely denied the presence of an adult, including a lawyer, during interrogation in which confessions may be extracted through abusive means. Abuses included beatings, verbal threats and insults, deprivation of food, and solitary confinement, resulting in forced confessions sometimes written in a language unknown to the child¹⁹.

- Arrest and detention (including administrative detention²⁰) of Palestinian children continued during 2008, with an average of 319 children detained at any given point during the year. In December 2008 this jumped to 342, a marked increase from the 327 children detained in November 2008 (DCI/PS).
- On average, 10 children were held in administrative detention in any given month during 2008 (DCI/PS). The corresponding number for 2007 is 14 (B'Tselem).

Closure of Charities

During 2008, charities providing support and services to children and their families across the OPT were raided or closed. Thousands of students, orphaned children, medical patients and needy families were affected when Islamic charities and other community organizations were targeted by Israeli authorities as well as by the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian factions. The charities included health centres, schools, orphanages, subsidized housing providers, income generating projects, fund-raising operations, warehouses of charitable goods, bakeries for needy families and children, cultural centres, grant and loan operations, vocational training centres, and sponsorship programmes for widows and orphans (OCHA).

- In the West Bank, between February and August, 27 affiliates of 13 institutions were targeted: Israeli authorities targeted at least 21 locations – impacting over 11,700 beneficiaries, including at least 5,000 children and an additional 400 families. The Palestinian Authority (PA) targeted at least six operations – impacting over 3,500 beneficiaries, including at least 750 children. In all cases, the institutions were targeted due to alleged affiliation with Hamas (OCHA).
- During July and August, the Hamas Authorities in Gaza raided some 210 institutions across Gaza and closed 185 of them (many of these were later reopened) – all due to alleged affiliation with Fatah. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that approximately 50,000 people were beneficiaries of these organizations including an estimated 28,000 children (OCHA, OCHA).



A boy sorts through the mess left from the raid of a charitable association in Hebron, April 2008.

¹⁹ Information from Israel/OPT informal Working Group on Security Council Resolution 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict.

²⁰ Administrative detention means that detainees may be held without charge or trial for up to six month periods that can be indefinitely renewed.



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2008 REVIEW

CHILD RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

Growing up as a child in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) can be tough. But last year it got even tougher. Here, Save the Children highlights some of the major trends of 2008 that have further endangered children's right to grow up happy, healthy, educated and safe.

At the end of 2007, over 57%¹ of OPT's 3.8 million people were in living in **poverty** (PCBS). Some 52% of these were children (OCHA), meaning that over 1.1 million Palestinian children began 2008 impoverished.

- One of the biggest blows to the economy was the continued blockade of Gaza – resulting in 98% of its industrial economy collapsing even before the Israeli offensive started in the closing days of 2008 (World Bank). Prior to the blockade, Gaza contributed 44% of the overall Palestinian GDP (World Bank).
- In 2008 about 12% of the West Bank was isolated by the Separation Wall and between August 2005 and May 2008, the number of Israeli obstacles increased by 62% (World Bank). From 2000 to 2008, real per capita GDP declined by about 34% (IMF).
- By September 2008 overall unemployment² in the OPT was 32.7% – 26.4% in the West Bank and 46.1% in Gaza (OCHA).
- Overall during 2007, the Palestinian economy contracted by -0.5% (IMF); in comparison, the Israeli economy grew by 5.4% (IMF).

Against the odds, child **health** generally fares well and the OPT strives to meet its target for Millennium Development Goal 4 of reducing under five mortality rates. That said, recent trends indicate children's health is increasingly at risk:

- Since 1996, the prevalence of stunting (which can indicate malnutrition and risk of poor cognitive development) in Palestinian children has steadily increased to 10% of children in 2006³.
- In May 2008, 8% of children under five in the West Bank were chronically malnourished, but the situation is most acute in Gaza where 13% of under fives suffered from chronic malnutrition (WHO).
- As of May 2008, 29.6% of pregnant women in the West Bank and 31.26% in Gaza were anaemic (WHO). In the West Bank, about a third of children under the age of three were anaemic and in Gaza, over half of children under three were anaemic (WHO).

The Palestinian **education** system was historically considered one of the best in the region, but conflict and poverty are taking their toll. The education system is increasingly plagued by overcrowded schools (which often run on double shift systems), ageing infrastructure, access restrictions (affecting students, teachers and – in Gaza – supplies), and disruptions caused by military operations or curfews.

- School attendance and performance are declining across the OPT. In the first term of the 2008/2009 school year, approximately 50% of sixth graders from the Nablus and Jenin governorates of the West Bank failed their standardized exams in Math, Science, English and Arabic (UNICEF). At the same time, 80% of 16,000 Gaza sixth graders failed standardized exams in the same subjects (UNICEF).



A girl playing in the kindergarden playground in Al Aqaba, May 08.

The following pages will show the impact of 2008 trends on a child's right to health, education, protection, and a decent standard of living - with particular focus on those issues expected to remain serious concerns in 2009. Although not addressed here, the offensive on Gaza from 27 December to 18 January 2009 dramatically demonstrates the terrible consequences of armed conflict on children.

¹ This is income-based poverty; if aid is included, the consumption-based poverty rate is 30.3%.

² Relaxed definition, includes inactive as well as active job seekers in the total number of unemployed persons.

³ Health in the OPT. The Lancet, March 2009.

THERE'S MORE...

On top of all of this, during 2008 children in the West Bank also faced an increase in Israeli settler violence against them, a drought brought on by lack of rain and water access restrictions, and the continued demolition of their homes. In Gaza, children contended with the devastating and pervasive impacts of the continued Israeli blockade as well as a far-reaching Palestinian factional divide that wreaked tumult on their schools and threatened their access to healthcare.

Settler Violence

Children in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are increasingly the victims of Israeli settler violence as they travel to and from school, as they tend livestock or land, and while they play outdoors. Though settler violence occurred throughout 2008, it was especially noted during the olive harvest, following the dismantling of settlement outposts, and in retaliation for Palestinian violence. In the first ten months of 2008 alone, there were 290 incidents of Israeli settler violence compared to 182 and 243 in 2006 and 2007 respectively (OCHA).

- There are close to 470,000 Israeli settlers (OCHA) living in at least 149 settlements across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem⁷.
- Of the Palestinian children killed and injured during 2008, at least one was killed and 45 were injured at the hands of Israeli settlers (OCHA). By comparison, at least 27 children were injured and no children were killed in 2007 (Child Rights Monitor).
- During 2008, there were at least five reported attacks on schools by Israeli settlers⁸.
- In the three schools located closest to settlements in Hebron, attendance dropped by more than 35% between 2001 and the 2007/2008 school year⁹.
- In At-Tuwani (Hebron Governorate), children were verbally threatened, harassed and physically attacked by Israeli settlers as they travelled to and from school. An Israeli military escort is mandated to accompany children, but throughout 2008 the escort was frequently late or abandoned the children before the route was complete (OCHA). This has been ongoing since at least 2004, when the Israeli military escort was first mandated¹⁰.

Drought

During 2008, children in the West Bank faced the most severe drought in 10 years (UNICEF). Herder and Bedouin families (living primarily in the southern West Bank, the Jordan Valley and to the east of Jerusalem) were especially hard-hit by the lack of rainfall combined with restricted water access, which had ramifications for livestock and agriculture based livelihoods (FAO); health, sanitation and hygiene; and domestic water intake (UNICEF). Traditionally during a dry spell, herder families would move their livestock to greener areas; however ongoing restrictions across the West Bank made such movement impossible (FAO). With a weak economy and concerns of a recurring drought in 2009, the outlook for children in herder and Bedouin communities seems unlikely to improve.

- During winter 2007/2008 rainfall in the West Bank was 26% of the expected annual average rainfall and in the Hebron Governorate it was as low as 13% (FAO).
- At the very least, some 2,500 households were directly impacted by the drought (FAO).
- In the West Bank between June 2007 and June 2008, the Consumer price index for food went up by over 20% -- a fact at least partly attributable to drought (UNICEF).
- Lack of rainfall especially impacts communities who rely on natural sources for their water intake. When these sources dry up, families are forced to purchase trucked water, often at great expense -- in the northeast West Bank, some families reportedly spent as much as 30% of their income for trucked water (UNICEF).
- In the most severely impacted communities, average daily domestic water consumption was as little as 15 litres per person -- 10% of the WHO minimum requirement (UNICEF).
- As families cut back on water use, hygiene and health risks increased, making children vulnerable to infections such as trachoma, conjunctivitis, dysentery and hookworm, among others (UNICEF).

Forced Displacement

In the OPT, children may be forced to leave their homes for a number of reasons, including: conflict, home demolition, eviction, residency revocation, military clearing operations, and land seizure for settlement expansion and construction of the Separation Wall -- along with the associated limitations on freedom of movement. During 2008, communities and families most vulnerable to forced displacement by home demolition were those living in East Jerusalem, the Gaza so-called "buffer zone"¹¹, Israeli-controlled Area C¹² of the West Bank, and communities nearby to Israeli settlements and the Separation Wall. Bedouin children also continued to be especially impacted by displacement.



Children participating in Save the Children activities at an IDP camp in Jabalia, Gaza.

- During 2008, a confirmed 419 children and an additional estimated 194 children were displaced or affected¹³ by home demolition across the OPT. Additionally hundreds of children are believed to have been displaced in Gaza during the final days of 2008¹⁴. By comparison, just 240 children were confirmed displaced during 2007 (OCHA).
- During 2008, there were 377 Palestinian houses demolished, compared to 359 in 2007¹⁵.
- Children frequently experience gaps in access to education, health facilities and clean water in the immediate aftermath of a demolition¹⁶.
- Displaced families suffer the strain of financial loss and physical and social upheaval; making children more vulnerable to family tension. Displaced children are also prone to anxiety, depression, a decline in school performance, and attention difficulties¹⁷.
- In a 2008 Gaza study, 28.2% of children surveyed had witnessed the demolition of a friend's home and 18.5% had witnessed the demolition of their own home (Gaza Community Mental Health Programme).

East Jerusalem

Children in East Jerusalem face an especially potent combination of issues, including: forced displacement, poverty, a collapsing educational system and restrictions on their freedom of movement.

- During 2008, 227 children (from a total of 404 people) were displaced as a result of 87 house demolitions in East Jerusalem (ICAHD). In 2007, 152 children were displaced as a result of 78 house demolitions (ICAHD).
- According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, most recent data shows that 77.2% of Palestinian children in East Jerusalem were below the poverty line (ACR).
- According to the Jerusalem Municipality, the post-elementary school dropout rate in East Jerusalem is about 50% (ACR).
- Approximately 9,000 Palestinian children do not attend school in East Jerusalem because there are not enough public classrooms to accommodate them and they cannot afford private schooling (OCHA).
- Also in East Jerusalem, the Separation Wall makes getting to and from school difficult for some 6,000 school children and 650 teachers (UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia).

The Gaza Blockade

The 22-month blockade of Gaza added to the suffering of hundreds of thousands of children by restricting their access to the most basic supplies. In November 2008 the blockade was further intensified, causing stocks of fuel, cooking gas, flour, humanitarian food aid, cash, and educational supplies to become dangerously low (OCHA). As a result of shortages of fuel and parts, Gaza's only power plant was shut down, plunging the territory into an electricity crisis with rolling blackouts of up to 16 hours in the worst affected areas (OCHA). The severe shortages of pharmaceutical and educational supplies due to the blockade, combined with the impact of the factional split, worsened the already dismal state of Gaza's health and education services (OCHA/WHO, OCHA).

- During 2008, 80% of Gaza relied on food aid and direct assistance to survive (OCHA).
- In November 2008, at any given time, 650,000 people in Gaza, including 364,000 children, were without electricity (OCHA).
- Also in November 2008, WHO estimated that 80% of the water supply in Gaza was not suitable for human consumption -- due in large part to fuel, chlorine and spare part shortages resulting from the blockade (OCHA). These same shortages also put serious strain on the sanitation system (CMWU).
- In November, UNRWA reported that it would be unable to print second semester textbooks for 200,000 students due to blockade restrictions on school supplies (OCHA).



"Since one week ago, the electricity supply has started to be cut off for a very long time; now it is 10 o'clock in the morning, and I haven't seen the electricity since 6 o'clock yesterday morning... I want to convey one single message to all: please stop punishing us. We are innocent children. Rockets should stop, Israeli killing should stop and the electricity should come back. I also call on the countries of the world to work to lift the siege imposed on us here in Gaza."

Lamees, 13, Sheikh Zayed, Gaza.

The Factional Split

Lack of unity between rival Palestinian factions (the largest of which are Fatah and Hamas) has made life even more difficult for children in Gaza by hampering their access to essential services. An unprecedented manifestation of the factional rift between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas were the Gaza health and education sector strikes, which began at the end of August and continued through December 2008 and on into 2009. The strikes caused wide-spread disruptions in education and healthcare, as well as confusion for school children, patients and employees.¹⁸ In the months before Israel's military operation in Gaza, children's access to water and waste-water services were also jeopardized (OCHA). For more on the strikes, read our October 2008 Child Rights Fact Sheet.

⁷ The Humanitarian Impact on Palestinians of Israeli Settlements and Other Infrastructure in the West Bank, OCHA.

⁸ Information from Israel/OPT Working Group on Security Council Resolution 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict.

⁹ UNICEF/UNRWA Children and Education Fact Sheet and UNICEF email correspondence.

¹⁰ Information from Israel/OPT Working Group on Security Council Resolution 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict.

¹¹ The "Buffer Zone" is a no-go area along the Gaza perimeter with Israel, and southern Gaza, extending from 500 meters to one kilometre inside Gaza.

¹² Area C refers to those parts of the West Bank that are under full Israeli military and civil control.

¹³ "Affected" refers to persons whose seasonal residence has recently been destroyed (i.e. a winter residence of a herder or Bedouin family).

¹⁴ Information from Israel/OPT Working Group on Security Council Resolution 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict.

¹⁵ Statistics on House Demolitions (1967-2009), Israeli Committee against House Demolitions.

¹⁶ Forthcoming report Broken Homes: The Impact of House Demolitions on Palestinian Children & Families, prepared by the Palestinian Counselling Centre, Save the Children UK and the Welfare Association.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Data and dates are collected from the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) press releases and the WHO report on the impact of the strike Annex# 1. PCHR source: <http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/PressR/English/2008/82-2008.html>