



## What we do in the occupied Palestinian territory

- We're saving lives and alleviating the suffering of children in Gaza
- We're protecting children from violence and forced displacement
- We're advocating for children's rights and promoting children's participation
- We're improving access to basic services



The occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) – the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza – has experienced more than 60 years of conflict, which has created the world's largest refugee population. Many people live in exile, often in overcrowded camps. Just over half the 3.7 million people living in the OPT 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.

Many Palestinians have now lost all hope for the future. Palestinian groups remain armed and active and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory continues. In December 2008, Israel launched a 23-day military offensive in Gaza that claimed the lives of more than 1,400 Palestinians, including 314 children. Thousands more were injured or traumatised. More than 4,000 homes were destroyed and around 200,000 people were displaced at the height of the fighting, and many schools and clinics were also badly damaged. The crisis endangered the lives of nearly every child in Gaza, and the lives of Israeli children in areas subject to attacks. Lack of food, water and supplies still threaten children's health and wellbeing in Gaza.

According to the UN, in 2008 more than 1.2 million people – 80% of the population of Gaza – needed food aid to survive. The 18-month blockade that preceded the offensive meant that families were already living under extreme hardship. People can't move freely to buy and sell goods, and the unemployment rate is among the highest in the world, at around 40%. Across the OPT, **one in three families can't afford a balanced meal.**

During 2008, conditions in the West Bank have also continued to deteriorate. Restrictions on people's movement mean that many Palestinian families have lost their livelihoods. Many are threatened by forced evictions and house demolitions, as the construction of the Separation Wall and expansion of settlements continues apace. Palestinian children are being arbitrarily arrested and detained.

## **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 also provide emergency support to children and their families in Gaza. In 2008, our activities benefited 139,720 children.

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. We also work with Palestinian and Israeli NGOs and other international agencies.

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.

## **We're protecting children from violence and harm**

Palestinian children have borne the brunt of the conflict, and many experience violence every day in their homes, schools and communities. Even before the December 2008 military offensive, 95 Palestinian children had been killed and nearly 400 were injured as a result of the conflict. And hundreds of Palestinian children were arrested by the Israeli military, 30 of whom were held in detention without trial.

Although school enrolment rates are generally high in the OPT, the quality of education is poor because of the deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation. 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.

We're working to make children safer in their homes, schools and communities through two projects: the 'protective sphere' (reducing violence in schools and the wider community), and a programme of support for displaced people.

## **We're reducing violence in schools and the wider community**

In partnership with the Tamer Institute for Community Education, and with funding from the European Commission, we're building a 'protective sphere' to reduce violence in schools and in the wider community. We're carrying out activities in 15 schools run by the Palestinian Authority (six in Gaza and nine in the West Bank), benefiting 7,500 children. Working with teachers, children and their parents, we provide training on children's rights and alternatives to corporal punishment. Other activities include setting up school-based education committees (SBECs) in each of the 15 schools we support, training teachers and parents on how they can make children safer. The Ministry of Education is rolling out a policy to ban corporal punishment in schools, and has requested that the SBECs help them monitor its implementation.

We've also helped the community organise 'fun days', to improve children's psychological wellbeing. Children have used their creative talents to produce their own posters, T-shirts, and even a leaflet, 'Voices of Children from Gaza', to tell their own stories about what life is like.

This year, we'll expand the number of government schools we work in and start work in five schools run by the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the West Bank, with funding from Save the Children Norway.

## **We're helping communities at risk of being displaced**

With support from the EC's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), and working with the MA'AN Development and Training Centre, we're helping displaced people or communities at risk of being displaced meet their basic needs by providing access to water, healthcare and education. We're also helping people repair their homes, setting up safe play areas for children, and upgrading clinics. We're providing legal assistance, and setting up eight community protection committees so that people can prepare and implement their own plan in the event of being displaced. And we'll continue to provide emergency support to families who have had to leave their homes.

Through this project, we've developed a 'displacement assessment' form that has been approved by the UN as the best tool to identify displaced children's needs.

## **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.

## **We're improving monitoring and documentation of children's rights**

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 that violations of children's rights are brought to the attention of world leaders.

During 2008, we had a number of successes through our advocacy work. Together with UNICEF and Defence for Children International, we've set up a Working Group to monitor serious violations of UN Security Council Resolution 1612 (on children in armed conflict), and we're training staff from partner organisations to gather evidence to report such violations. We've also persuaded the UN to prioritise the setting up of an inter-agency response to situations of forced displacement. And we're supporting local partners to strengthen their work to monitor and document the impact of the conflict on children.

## **We're promoting children's participation**

We're working with the Palestinian Authority to carry out its first ever comprehensive report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. With our support, 2,500 children will be actively involved in this process and contribute their views.

In 2008, our activities to support children's participation included getting 450 children in four areas of the West Bank to take part in our 'Get on Track' campaign. This aimed to get world leaders to redouble their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, reducing the numbers of women and children who die from preventable and treatable causes. The Palestinian children focused on 'the right to health'. They put across their messages using drama and drawing.

We're also getting children actively involved in our Child Rights Situation Analysis – a tool we use to work out what children need and how we can best respond to those needs – by setting up a reference group of five children. They will be regularly involved in our programme planning work in the OPT, as well as helping us monitor how we implement our work.

## **We're improving children's access to essential services**

Due to the conflict, the blockade, curfews and other restrictions on people's movement, people often can't get healthcare when they need it. Doctors and nurses are often unable to travel to work, and medical personnel and facilities come under attack. Local clinics that are ill-equipped to meet the level of demand have become the frontline in healthcare.

The fighting has also fuelled poverty, which in turn drives malnutrition and disease, with children the most vulnerable. Chronic malnutrition affects nearly 10% of children under five in the OPT. The situation is worst in Gaza, where even before the offensive, 50,000 children were malnourished.

We're improving children's access to basic services. This year and next year, we'll provide medical equipment and resources to 20 clinics serving 60,000 people living near Gaza's 'buffer zone' and the West Bank Separation Wall. We'll also train healthcare staff, and provide technical aids and other medical supplies to children with special needs. We'll help children campaign for the 1999 Disability Law to be implemented, and lobby for children with special needs to be placed firmly on the agenda of the Ministry of Health and other international and national health organisations.

## **We're responding to emergency needs**

Life for the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza is now worse than it's ever been, and children are bearing the brunt of the suffering. The military offensive in December 2008 caused a grave humanitarian crisis.

In the OPT, when we respond to an emergency, we respond as the International Save the Children Alliance, pooling the resources and expertise of our national organisations from Sweden and the United States as well as the UK. In Gaza, we launched a major emergency response for a six-month period, with the aim of saving lives, alleviating children's suffering, and helping people rebuild their homes.

In the first three months, from January to March 2009, we reached 105,441 people, including nearly 60,000 children. We distributed essential supplies to families who lost their homes, including bedding, baby kits and hygiene kits, and cooking equipment. We set up child-friendly spaces – safe areas where children can do normal things like play and talk – to help them cope with the trauma they've experienced. And we helped people get clean water by equipping the Gaza Coastal Water Utility (GCWU) with a portable fuel tank to service 200 treatment plants every day, and a portable water tank to supply 1,000 people with at least 10 litres of water a day.

Right from the first day of the offensive, our staff on the ground were doing media interviews and writing web blogs to describe the horror of what was happening. Inspired by their efforts under very difficult circumstances (not knowing if their own families were safe, for instance), within a week we had launched an award-winning, innovative campaign – Enough is Enough. We took out full-page newspaper ads calling on ordinary people to use their mobile phones to text 'ceasefire' to help us put pressure on world leaders to bring an end to the suffering. More than 183,000 people did so – that's one text every second. A ceasefire was eventually declared on 18 January 2009.

During 2008, in a separate response, Save the Children UK also provided life-saving medical equipment for babies in the neonatal intensive care unit and special baby care unit at Nasser Paediatric Hospital. We supplied the GCWU with 6,100 litres of fuel, which benefited more than 180,000 people in Khanyounis, Rafah and Wadi Gaza. And we provided 405 children from six schools with 210 food parcels and 195 clothes kits. Overall, last year Save the

Children UK's emergency response reached 119,375 children in Gaza, more than 61,000 of them girls.



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