



On World Children's Day: ICC should immediately issue arrest warrants for Israeli officials responsible for flagrant international crimes against Palestinian children

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World Children's Day, on 20 November 2023, marked a global initiative to promote respect for and protection of children's rights around the world, in accordance with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). For more than one million Palestinian children in Gaza, this year World Children's Day coincides with the 45th consecutive day of Israel's military aggression against Gaza. In 45 days, some 5,350 Palestinian children have been killed in Gaza.^[1] That is about one in every 200 children. Moreover, at the time of writing, thousands of children are missing under the rubble of destroyed buildings, most of them presumed dead, and over a million children are at risk of starvation and dehydration. Our three organizations—the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Al Mezan, and Al-Haq—have collected information on the ground that indicates that Israeli forces and authorities have been perpetrating gross violations against Palestinian children that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Accordingly, we call upon the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to immediately investigate these crimes and to issue arrest warrants for the Israeli officials responsible for flagrant crimes against Palestinian children, in line with the Court's own stated policy. Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, is home to 2.3 million Palestinians, half of them

children. Over the past five weeks, Israeli forces have displaced hundreds of thousands of people from northern and central Gaza southward, causing unprecedented population density in the absence of services and resources. Israel's relentless military attacks by air, sea and land and the medieval siege imposed on Gaza have produced a man-made humanitarian disaster and caused incomparable suffering to Palestinian children. Hundreds of thousands of forcibly displaced children are currently struggling under dire conditions inside shelters. These children have been forced to endure harsh weather conditions as forcibly displaced persons without adequate clothes and blankets, especially in rainy and cold temperatures in Gaza. They lack decent shelter, food and water, and their families are struggling for necessities. Between 18 and 19 November, Israeli forces reportedly attacked three schools serving as shelters in northern Gaza, resulting in many fatalities, further testifying that no one and nowhere is safe in Gaza. These children and their families are exposed to diseases and epidemics due to overcrowding, lack of basic sanitation facilities and unsuitable water consumption. The collapse of Gaza's health system comes with devastating effects on Gaza's children in both the short and long term. In the past 45 days, more than 30,000 Palestinians, including thousands of children, have suffered various injuries, including severe burns, amputations and surgeries without anaesthesia or proper care due to the precarious conditions of Gaza's health care system and the shortage of medical supplies caused by Israeli policies. Pregnant women are forced to give birth at home in inadequate conditions, putting their lives and the lives of their newborns in serious danger. During the siege and the invasion of Al-Shifa Hospital, at least five premature newborns in the neonatal intensive care unit died because of Israeli policies and attacks that led to the collapse of the medical complex. The remaining 31 infants were transferred on Sunday 19th November in harsh conditions, through coordination with the World Health Organization, to a hospital in Rafah, preparing for further treatment abroad. In addition, thousands of children have not received regular vaccinations due to their forced displacement and the closure of 27 hospitals and 57 health centers due to shelling and fuel shortages. As Israeli attacks on Gaza have intensified, talk of mental health has become a pipe dream, as all residents, especially children, suffer from the unprecedented shock, fear and terror caused by the massive indiscriminate Israeli attacks that have ensured that no one and nowhere in Gaza can be safe. In recent weeks, our team has been able to witness, through field visits to hospitals, homes or shelters accessible to them, or through

monitoring scenes filmed by journalists, gruesome scenes of children who have lost their entire families to Israeli air strikes, children shaking and screaming in fear and pain, and others pulled out from under the rubble in a severe state of shock. Some have had all four limbs amputated. Since the beginning of the aggression, schools have been completely disabled and dozens have been bombed, 65 have been rendered completely out of service, and 262 have suffered various types of damage. This means that hundreds of thousands of students will be deprived of the right to education for long periods. Our organizations call on the international community to call for an immediate ceasefire, a halt to the Israeli aggression on Gaza, and to provide safe passage for aid delivery and the evacuation of the wounded, especially children in need of urgent medical intervention. We emphasize that these actions must be accompanied by the immediate entry of fuel and humanitarian aid, including water, food, and medical supplies, without any restrictions, to be distributed throughout the Gaza Strip to alleviate the ongoing humanitarian disaster resulting from Israeli collective punishment policies against the civilian population. Third States must pressure Israel to allow the immediate and unconditional transfer of patients from Gaza for medical treatment outside the Strip, including life-saving treatment. This is particularly crucial as Israeli authorities have prevented the transfer of the wounded from northern and central Gaza after isolating those areas from the rest of the Strip. Lastly, we call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to add Israel to your list of perpetrators of grave violations against children in armed conflict (the so-called “list of shame”) with immediate effect.

^[1] Since 11 November, following the collapse of services and communications at hospitals in the north, the Ministry of Health in Gaza has not updated cumulative casualty figures. According to the Office of the Palestinian Minister of Health, Dr. Mai Al-Kaila, the reported fatality toll as of 19 November evening (latest update provided) stood at 12,700 Palestinians killed in Gaza since 7 October, of whom almost 5,350 were children, 3,250 women and 695 were elderly. About 4,500 others, including some 3,500 children and women, have been reported missing and may be trapped or dead under the rubble, awaiting rescue or recovery. Another 30,000 Palestinians have reportedly been injured.

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