



Photo: Ibrahim Raida

# Children and Armed Conflict

**Annual statistical report on violations against children in times of  
armed conflict in the Gaza Strip**  
in accordance with the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms  
established by UN Security Council Resolution 1612

**Reporting period: 1 January – 31 December 2020**

January 2021



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## Introduction

Children are the most vulnerable at times of armed conflict as they are incapable of taking necessary measures to maintain their wellbeing and are thus entirely dependent on others to meet their survival needs. Therefore, children are not only affected by direct targeting leading to their death or injury but are also gravely affected by any harm to their guardians, homes, schools and hospitals as it puts enjoyment of their basic needs in jeopardy. In addition to falling victims to direct and indirect targeting, children in regions ravaged by armed conflict have been actively exploited and recruited into the ranks of armed groups and states' armed forces to take part in hostilities.

In the context of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian children fall victims to an array of grave violations perpetrated by Israeli authorities and, to a lesser extent, Palestinian non-state actors. The most common grave violations against children documented in Gaza include: killing, injury, arrest and detention, attacks against schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.

The figures presented in this statistical report, which are based on data collected from the field, cover grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict in accordance with the UN-established Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1612.

It is important to note the report provides data on the most common types of, and not necessarily all, grave violations recorded in the reporting period. As such, absence of a grave violation category in the report should in no way be taken as a confirmation of non- occurrence of such violation.



## Background

From the outset of its establishment, the United Nation has maintained that children are entitled to special care and assistance by enshrining this universal conviction in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and later expanding upon it in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (adopted in 1959), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (both entered into force in 1976). Yet the alarming rise in exploitation and recruitment of children in armed conflicts during the nineteen eighties made evident that more concrete actions were required on the part of the international community. In 1989, the United Nations adopted the landmark Convention on the Right of the Child, the first legally binding international instrument entirely dedicated to children's rights.

The convention, which entered into force the following year, adopts a set of non-negotiable, internationally-accepted standards and obligations that provide protection and support for children's rights, and defines a child as any human under the age of eighteen years.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, a body of experts in charge of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Convention, proposed implementing a major study to further understand the impact of armed conflicts on children. As a result, in December 1993, the UN General Assembly (UN GA Resolution 48/157) requested that the UN Secretary-General appoints an expert to undertake a comprehensive study on the subject matter, including the participation of children in armed conflicts. Ms. Graça Machel was appointed by the UN Secretary-General to conduct the study, which was submitted to the UN General Assembly in 1996.

### Preconditions for reporting violations under the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) in accordance with UN SC Resolution 1612

**Context:** the acts must be committed in the context of and be associated with armed conflict.

**Victim:** a child or children, i.e. persons under the 18 years of age.

**Perpetrator:** Members of state armed forces or non-state armed group.

**Armed forces:** refers to the armed forces of a state.

**Armed groups:** refers to groups distinct from armed forces.

*Remark: The MRM does not typically focus on isolated violations committed by civilians in what could be characterized as criminal activities.*

The study recommended, inter alia, the establishment of a special representative of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict to keep protection of children on the international human rights agenda and guarantee greater involvement of the security council concerning child specific concerns.



In 1997, the first Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was appointed, and in 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child: one on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography; and another on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The latter prohibits compulsory recruitment of children under 18 years into States Parties' armed forces, and prohibits their recruitment, under any circumstances, into armed groups.

In 1999, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1261, the first Security Council resolution to address the targeting of children in armed conflict including the recruitment and use of child soldiers. In 2003, the UN Secretary-General presented in his annual report

on Children and Armed Conflict a list of “especially egregious violations” that should receive priority in monitoring activities. The list included, among others: recruiting and use of child soldiers, killing and maiming of children, and denial of humanitarian access to children.

Several other Security Council resolutions on the issue were adopted between 2000 and 2005, culminating in the adoption of UN Resolution 1612 (in 2005) which provided for the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) to “provide timely, objective, accurate and reliable information the recruitment and use of child soldiers in violation of applicable international law and on other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict.”

The MRM was to be established in country-situations where parties to conflict had been listed in the annex of the annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. Initially, only parties involved in recruitment and use of children in armed conflict were listed in the annual report but the criteria for listening parties was later expanded pursuant to UN Security Council resolutions 1882, 1998, and 2225 to include: killing and maiming of children; rape and other sexual violence against children; attacks or threats against schools and hospitals; and abduction of children.

Pursuant to UN Resolution 1612, a Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting, led by UNICEF and the UN High Representative, is established in country-situation listed in the annex of the UN Secretary-General annual report on Children and Armed Conflict to manage implementation of MRM locally and report back to the Security Council-level Working Group

The country-level working group for Israel and oPt has been reporting on the six grave violations as listed in the UN SG annual reports on Children and Armed Conflict, in addition to three other country-specific violations.

**The six grave violations against children:**

- Killing and maiming of children.
- Recruiting and use of child soldiers.
- Attacks on schools and hospitals.
- Sexual violence against children.
- Abduction of children.
- Denial of humanitarian access to children.

**In the context of oPt and Israel, the country-level working group additionally reports on:**

- Arrest and detention
- Torture and ill-treatment
- Displacement

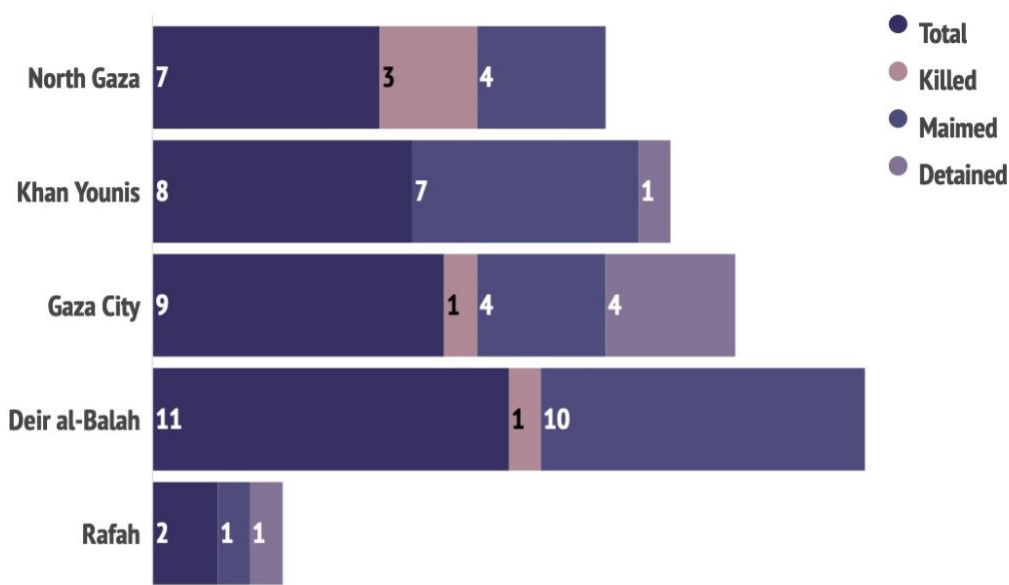


(also established under UN Resolution 1612), consisting of all members of the Council, which is in charge of reviewing progress of MRM and making recommendations to the council on possible measures to strengthen protection of children affected by armed conflict.

UNICEF has led the country-level working group, composed of Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights organizations, to voluntarily report on violations committed against children in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

### MRM Reports

The Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting is established to implement the MRM at country level and submit regular reports on children affected by armed conflict to the UN Security Council Working Group, which in turn makes recommendations to the UN Security Council on possible measures to promote the protection of affected children, including by recommending sanctions against perpetrators of grave violations against children.



Child victims of Israeli forces and Palestinian non-state actors



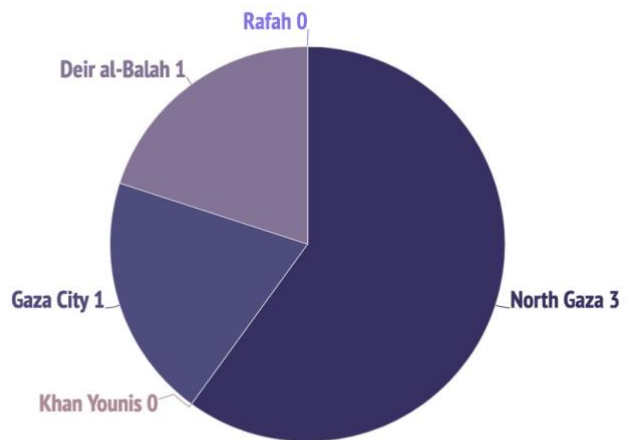


## Grave violations against children in the Gaza Strip

### Killing and maiming of children

Palestinian children killed or maimed in conflict-related incidents in the Gaza Strip, whether by direct targeting or indirect actions, such as misuse of firearms and blasts caused by unexploded ordnances, explosive devices and missiles.

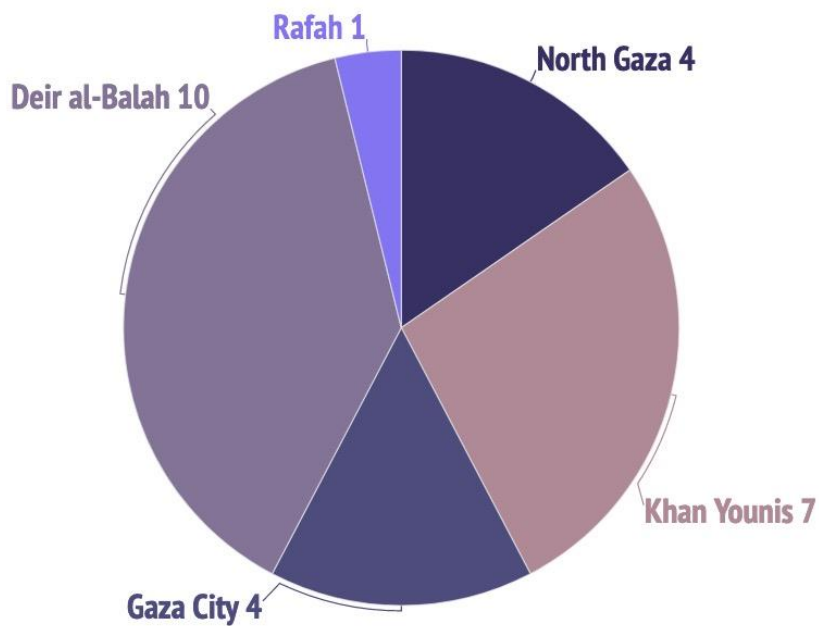
Child casualties of conflict-related incidents in 2020	
Children killed	5
Children injured	26
Total number of child casualties	31



Distribution of child fatalities by district of occurrence

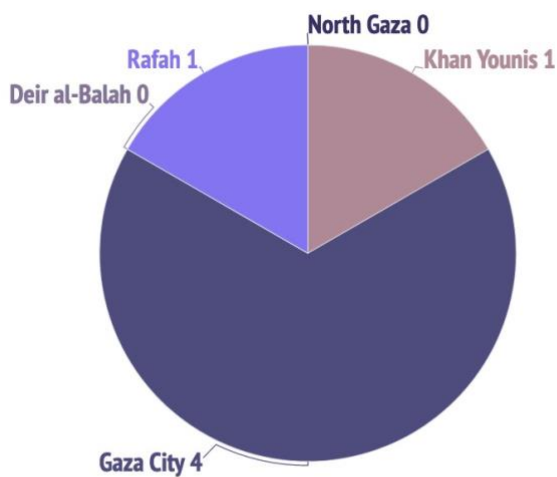


Photo: Ibrahim Raida



**Distribution of child injuries by district of occurrence**

**Arrest and detention of children**



Typically, Palestinian children (residents of Gaza) are arrested and detained by Israeli forces after approaching or crossing the separation fence, during Israeli incursions into Gaza, or in the context of Israeli navy’s regular arrests of Palestinian fishers off the coast of the Gaza Strip. Israeli forces arrested six children in the Gaza Strip in the reporting period.

**Distribution of arrested children by district of occurrence**





## Attacks against schools and hospitals

This category refers to schools and medical facilities that are subject to total or partial destruction, or any other interference to their normal operation, including due to occupation, shelling, targeting in their close vicinity, and causing harm to schools or medical facilities or its personnel.

Two elementary schools and one hospital sustained partial damages in the aftermath of airstrikes carried out by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip during the reporting period.

On Thursday morning, 13 August 2020, an Israeli missile struck Beach Co-Educational Elementary School “D” in al-Shati (Beach) refugee camp in Gaza without detonating. The elementary school is run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)



and has sustained damages to its building as a result of the airstrike. No students were present at the time, but the location of the attack prompted panic and speculations among civilians in the surrounding residential area.

On 26 December 2020, at around 12:40 am, Israeli warplanes fired five missiles at a vacant land in the vicinity of al-Tuffah neighborhood, east of Gaza City. A six-year-old girl, Yasmin Mohamed al-Ashqar, sustained injuries due to the attack. The airstrike also caused damages to al-Durrah Children’s Hospital, Gaza Martyrs Elementary School, and a rehabilitation facility for people with disabilities run by the Ministry of Social Development.



## Displacement (House demolitions)

In the reporting period, 142 Palestinians in Gaza, including 32 women and 71 children, were displaced as their homes sustained damages due to Israeli military airstrikes and artillery shelling. This widespread practice of damaging civilian structures, even when not resulting in mass destruction, always leads to the displacement of the civilian residents.

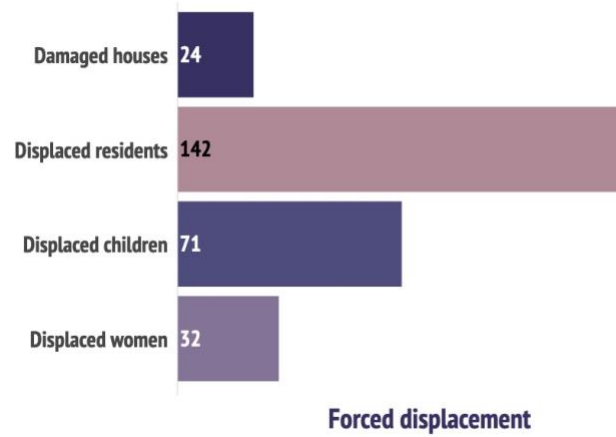


Photo: Ibrahim Ralda





## Denial of humanitarian access

Rooted in severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods, Israel's closure has crippled Gaza's healthcare system and subjected thousands of Palestinian patients with life-threatening conditions to additional suffering. Al Mezan's documentation shows that, in 2020, two children died after they could not secure the required Israeli-issued permits to leave Gaza to receive medical care at Sheba Medical Center in Israel and at Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem. Al Mezan also received legal complaints concerning 121 children, resident of Gaza, whose requests for exit permits to Israeli authorities were either denied or remained pending by the date of their hospital appointment. Only 74 of whom were eventually able to exit Gaza following Al Mezan's legal intervention.

*The above-listed number of children who were denied or delayed access to medical care outside Gaza is limited to cases that were brought to Al Mezan's attention through its fieldwork and legal aid services. The total number is believed to be much higher but cannot be determined due to the suspension of coordination between the PA and Israel during the reporting period.*





## Conclusion

The field data shows that five Palestinian children were killed and 26 others had been injured in the Gaza Strip in conflict-related incidents. The documented incidents include casualties of Israeli military attacks and actions of Palestinian actors, whether through direct attacks or indirect actions in relation to the conflict, such as misuse of firearms and blasts caused by unexploded ordnances, explosive devices or missiles.

Figures on other grave violations presented in the report show that children continue to fall victims to arbitrary detention, and their access to safe education environment continues to be undermined. Children in Gaza are also affected by the repercussions of Israel's closure, including severe restrictions on freedom of movement and chronic shortage of power supply.

Israel has failed to comply with the provisions of the Convention on the Right of the Child, to which it is a party, and continue to dispute the applicability of the Convention to the occupied territories under its effective control. Its failure has far-reaching effects on the physical and mental wellbeing of Palestinian children who are struggling to lead a normal life in the midst of the ongoing conflict.

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights strongly condemns the continued violations against Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip. Al Mezan believes that the continued Israeli violations of the International Humanitarian Law and the International Human Rights Law is but a reflection of the international community's inability to carry out its legal and moral obligations to protect children's rights in the oPt, which in turn has emboldened perpetrators to continue unabated with such actions. Al Mezan reiterates its call on the international community to take urgent and effective action to put an end to Israeli violations of the rules of international law, particularly those relevant to children's rights, and to ensure justice to child victims of grave violations by holding perpetrators to account.