

UN officials call for children's rights to be respected in Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel

Children's rights continue to be violated in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Israel, according to three leading UN officials in the region who on Wednesday called on all parties responsible to take concrete and immediate steps to "allow children to live free of fear and to realize all their rights".

In a [joint statement](#), the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), [Jamie McGoldrick](#); the Head of the UN Human Rights office (OHCHR) in the OPT, James Heenan; and the Special Representative for the [UN Children's Fund \(UNICEF\)](#) in the State of Palestine, Genevieve Boutin, said they were "deeply concerned" by continued reports of "children killed or seriously injured, some as young as 11" in Palestinian-administered areas.

They also denounced the fact that "children in Israel are exposed to fear, trauma, and grave injuries".

"This month alone, seven Palestinian children were killed by live ammunition and shelling from Israel", they said, adding that "two Israeli girls aged 14 and 15 also reportedly sustained injuries from rockets and mortar shells indiscriminately launched by Palestinian armed groups towards Israel".

According to figures provided by UN agencies in the region, since the start of demonstrations at the border fence against Israel's longstanding blockade and deteriorating living conditions in Gaza on 30 March, 26 Palestinian children have been killed.

21 were shot during the demonstrations, and five others were killed by Israeli shelling, or outside the context of demonstrations. In the same period, hundreds more children have been injured by live ammunition.

"A number of these children will suffer lifelong disabilities, including as a result of the amputation of limbs," the UN officials said. "Thousands are in need of urgent psycho-social assistance, specialised medical care, and support for their rehabilitation."

The statement stressed that "all over the Occupied Palestinian Territory, but particularly in the Gaza Strip", children are "robbed of every right."

"Families cope with four hours of electricity per day in the sweltering heat, clean drinking water is expensive and hard to find. The start of the school year in one month will be very difficult for tens of thousands of families who cannot afford basic school supplies," said the three UN officials.

In addition, they deplored the “too often cynical use of children in political rhetoric and propaganda on all sides,” citing last week’s call by the organisers of the ‘Great March of Return’ for Palestinians to demonstrate under the banner of “the Friday of our Child Martyrs” and the reported exposure of children to violence. “Children should never be the target of violence and must not be put at risk of violence, nor encouraged to participate in violence,” the joint statement read.

“We call on Israel, as well as the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas authorities in Gaza to put children’s rights ahead of any other considerations and to take immediate steps to alleviate their suffering,” said Mr. McGoldrick, Mr. Heenan and Ms. Boutin. “Respecting the rights of children and refraining from instrumentalising their plight should be a priority for all”, they insisted, stressing that the Israeli-Palestinian context is “not an exception”.

On 23 July, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, [briefed](#) the UN’s Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, on the many human rights violations facing women, children and men living in the OPT.

[Yemen: Attacks on water facilities, civilian infrastructure, breach ‘basic laws of war’ says UNICEF](#)

Ongoing violence and attacks on civilian infrastructure in Hudaydah directly threaten hundreds of thousands of children and their families in Yemen, according to the head of the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) in a statement released on Wednesday

“Attacks against civilian facilities and services are unacceptable, inhumane and in breach of the basic laws of war,” said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore.

“Yet the past few days have seen an escalation in the targeting of systems and facilities that are essential to sustaining the lives of children and families,” she added.

It was reported at the weekend that a UNICEF-supported warehouse containing humanitarian provisions, including hygiene and water-related supplies, was hit by two airstrikes.

Attacks on water infrastructure jeopardize efforts to prevent

another outbreak of cholera and acute watery diarrhoea in Yemen
– *Henrietta H. Fore, UNICEF Chief*

On Saturday, a UNICEF-supported sanitation centre in the Zabid District came under attack, damaging the facility's fuel tank. A day earlier, the al-Mina District water station was hit, which is the main source of water for the key port city.

Overall, 22 million people need some kind of assistance in Yemen after years of grinding conflict between government and Saudi-led coalition forces, who've been battling Houthi rebels for control of the country. Hudaydah is the main port for the shattered import-dependent economy, as more than 70 per cent of all humanitarian supplies, commercial goods and food brought into the country, passes through the docks there.



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UNICEF-supported emergency humanitarian supplies are distributed in Hudaydah in June 2018.

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, Lise Grande, on Sunday described Hudaydah as just “one airstrike away from an unstoppable epidemic” due to the looming risk of a fresh outbreak of deadly water-borne cholera.

The UNICEF chief said on Wednesday that the country was “already facing a severe shortage of drinking water, which is directly linked to outbreaks of cholera and acute watery diarrhea,” underscoring that attacks on water infrastructure “jeopardize efforts to prevent another outbreak of cholera and acute watery diarrhoea in Yemen.”

The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) said that Hudaydah had registered the highest incidences of suspected cholera cases of any city; around 14 per cent of those reported nationwide since the start of a crippling outbreak, in April 2017.

Ms. Fore again called on everyone involved in fighting to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. “The war in Yemen has no winners. It is robbing Yemeni children of their futures,” she concluded.

[Afghanistan: Jalalabad attacks provoke ‘outrage’ and ‘strongest’ condemnation from UN Mission](#)

As part of a recent pattern of attacks in Afghanistan, at least 13 civilians were killed and 20 others wounded on Tuesday in Jalalabad, drawing “outrage” and condemnation “in the strongest terms” from the United Nations Assistance Mission in the country, [UNAMA](#).

“The province’s Refugee Department was [deliberately targeted](#) in today’s attack by a group of men including suicide bombers,” UNAMA said in a statement, pointing out that the building was badly damaged during the hours-long barrage of gunfire.

The mission noted that Jalalabad and the surrounding region have in recent months seen a significant number of attacks targeting civilians, including schools and hospitals.

Earlier in the week, there was separate suicide attack against a midwifery education centre in the eastern city, this is the capital of Nangarhar Province.

“These attacks deliberately targeting civilians are abhorrent,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan. “The killings amount to atrocities, and everything must be done to bring the planners to account.”

UNAMA stressed that all parties to the conflict must “at all times uphold their obligations to protect civilians” and reiterated its call for combatants to “immediately cease targeting civilians and civilian objects, including schools and health facilities, in compliance with international humanitarian law.”

The UN in Afghanistan expressed its condolences to the loved ones of those killed and wished the injured a full and speedy recovery.

UN calls on Saudi Arabia to release jailed human rights defenders, including women activists

Concerned over the continuing arrests and “apparently arbitrary detentions” of human rights defenders – including campaigners who lobbied for an end to the ban on women driving – the United Nations human rights office (OHCHR) on Tuesday called on Saudi Arabia to “unconditionally” release all those being held.

Since 15 May, at least 15 Government critics have been detained, Ravina Shamdasani, OHCHR Spokesperson told a press briefing in Geneva.

“We understand that eight of them were later [temporarily released](#) until the completion of their procedural review,” Ms. Shamdasani said, noting that in some cases, “their whereabouts are unknown and there is a serious lack of transparency” in processing their cases.

In mid-May, a crackdown on prominent women’s rights defenders in Saudi Arabia seems to have kicked off a spate of arrests. In June, after an official visit, Ben Emmerson, UN special rapporteur on anti-terrorism, painted a [damning picture](#) of a country which he said was using anti-terror laws to systematically justify torture, suppress dissent and imprison human rights defenders.

“While the authorities have made statements about possible serious charges, that could lead to prison terms of up to 20 years, it is unclear whether charges have been laid in any of these cases,” Ms. Shamdasani continued.

Among those who reportedly remain imprisoned are Hatoon al-Fassi, a leading voice for women’s rights, and one of the first women to acquire a Saudi drivers’ license after the ban was lifted in late June.

“She was detained between 21 and 24 June,” continued the spokesperson. Others in detention include human rights defender Khaled Al-Omar – who has not been contactable since he was imprisoned on 6 July – as well as women’s rights activists Loujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Nouf Abdelaziz and Mayaa al-Zahrani. 80-year old lawyer Ibrahim al-Modaimegh, and activist Abdulaziz Meshaal are also imprisoned, said Ms. Shamdasani.

She underscored that OHCHR urges the Government to “unconditionally release all human rights defenders and activists who have been detained for their peaceful human rights work, including their decades-long campaigns for the lifting of the driving ban for women.”

Stressing that investigations must be held in a transparent manner, with full respect for due process rights, Ms. Shamdasani concluded by spelling out that “all human rights defenders should be able to carry out their crucial human

rights work without fear of reprisals or prosecution.”

[UN human rights body strongly condemns recent “shocking attacks” against civilians in south-west Syria](#)

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) issued a strongly-worded statement on Tuesday, denouncing last week’s brutal killings and raids by members of the terrorist group ISIL, in Sweida, south-west Syria.

“We have received reports that more than 200 people were killed and injured in multiple attacks, including suicide bombings in As-Sweida City and in various villages in eastern and northeastern rural As-Sweida Governorate,” said OHCHR Spokesperson, Ravina Shamdasani.

She also cited reports of “scores of ISIL militants” raiding homes in at least eight villages in rural areas of the governorate; shooting and killing civilians inside their homes and abducting women and children.

The Government of Syria has a duty to take action to prevent violent acts that may endanger the lives and well-being of civilians – *Ravina Shamdasani (OHCHR)*

“We have received the names of at least 27 women and children who were reportedly taken hostage from Al-Shbiki village in eastern rural As-Sweida,” she noted, adding that OHCHR believes the number to actually be much higher.

According to OHCHR, photos of some of the abducted women were later tweeted out, “with threats to burn them alive if the Government did not cease military operations against ISIL in western Dara’a Governorate, and release ISIL women and men in Government custody”.

Ms. Shamdasani explained that “these ISIL militants included many who were recently evacuated and relocated from the Palestinian Yarmouk Refugee Camp, Hajar Al-Aswad, and Al-Tadamon areas of southern Damascus, as part of a Government reconciliation agreement”.

“While agreements putting an end to fighting are to be welcomed, the well-being of civilians must be paramount in any considerations,” said the OHCHR Spokesperson, as she stressed that “the transfer of armed fighters with a history of gross human rights abuses and contempt towards international law, can mean an increase in the likelihood of violent attacks against civilians

like the ones carried out last week in As-Sweida”.

The UN human rights body is calling on the Government of Syria to take all necessary measures, in line with international human rights and humanitarian law, to protect civilians from attacks and to hold those responsible for crimes and human rights violations accountable.

“The Government of Syria has a duty to take action to prevent violent acts that may endanger the lives and well-being of civilians – including by not placing armed groups such as ISIL in their proximity”, said Ms. Shamdasani.