



Defence for Children International/Palestine Section
الحركة العالمية للدفاع عن الأطفال / فرع فلسطين

Child protection agencies concerned about abuse of child detainees

[JERUSALEM, 9 June 2009] – Approximately 700 Palestinian children were held in Israeli jails and detention facilities during 2008, including 20-30 children who were held in administrative detention on the basis of undisclosed evidence, according to a report published today by Defence for Children International–Palestine Section (DCI Palestine).

The annual report, which includes testimonies from formerly detained children across the West Bank, shows clear evidence that children as young as 12 are prosecuted in Israeli military courts, and are tried as adults as soon as they become 16, in contrast to Israeli law, where majority is attained at 18.

Israeli military courts violate many basic fair trial rights according to international humanitarian and human rights law and disregard fundamental principles of juvenile justice. For example, in almost all cases, the primary evidence used to convict children is a confession obtained through coercive interrogations carried out in the absence of a lawyer. The most common charge made against children was stone-throwing (about 27%), which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years. Bail was denied in nine out of 10 cases involving children. With the potential for harsh sentences, approximately 95% of cases end in the child pleading guilty, whether the offence was committed or not.

The overwhelming majority of children were held in detention facilities within Israel in contravention of international law; as a result, many received no family visits due to Israeli access and movement restrictions. In addition, only two out of five prisons holding children provide basic education services.

“The children’s stories, the data and the findings contained in DCI’s report, underline the critical need for Israel to honor its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice,” said UNICEF Special Representative Patricia McPhillips, speaking on behalf of Israeli, international and Palestinian organizations working on child protection issues in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). The UN Committee Against Torture also recently issued strong recommendations to Israel.

The child protection group is called “1612” because it monitors grave violations perpetrated by all parties against children in the conflict, as mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 1612. It reports regularly on killing and injury; recruitment or use of children in armed forces or groups; attacks on schools and hospitals; abduction; denial of humanitarian access; detention, torture and forced displacement.

The group is chaired by UNICEF and includes UNOCHA, OHCHR, UNRWA, WHO, Save the Children Alliance, Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights, B’Tselem, DCI Palestine, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights.

Key recommendations in the report, *Palestinian Child Prisoners*, include raising the age of majority for Palestinian children to 18 in line with Israeli law; ensuring that no person under the age of 18 is held without charge or trial in administrative detention without sufficient due process guarantees in

accordance with international law; and conducting interrogations in the presence of a lawyer and parent.