

Children Affected by Armed Conflict

Israel & the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)

May 2011

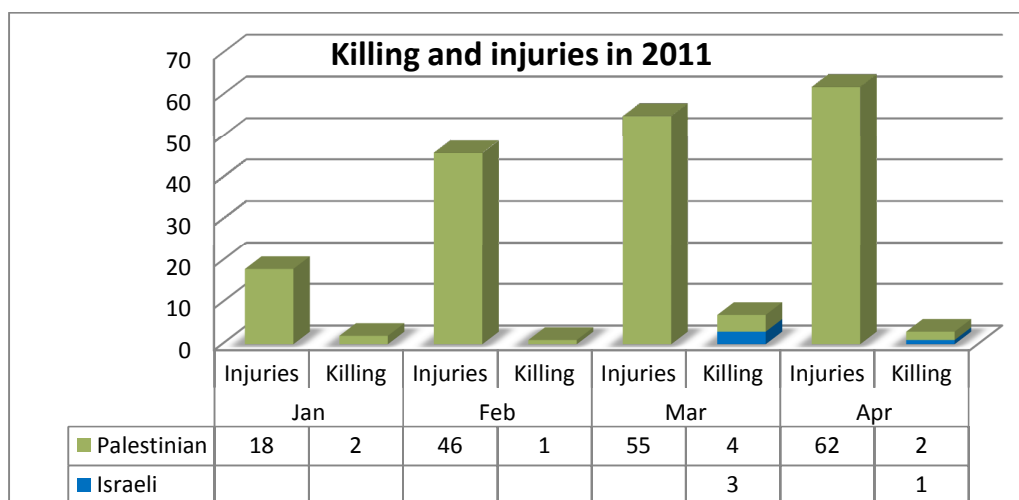


Since 2007, a UNICEF-led working group has consolidated efforts to report on the impacts of armed conflict on children in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Members of the working group include: Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Save the Children, DCI-Palestine, B'Tselem, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, War Child Holland, OCHA, OHCHR, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNRWA and WHO. The violations include killing and injuries, arrest and detention, ill-treatment and torture, recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups, attacks on schools and hospitals, displacement and denial of humanitarian access including access to health and education. The bulletin is published on a bi-monthly basis highlighting trends and patterns in grave violations against children. This bulletin reports on violations occurring during the months of March and April 2011.

KEY ISSUES

A key concern during this reporting period was the increase of violations and the highest levels of hostilities in Gaza since Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009). Measures are needed to ensure greater accountability. Cases resulting in the loss of civilian life, especially children, should be thoroughly investigated, and those responsible for unlawful acts held accountable.

KILLINGS AND INJURIES



During March and April, **ten children were killed** (9 boys and 1 girl) and **117 children were injured** (113 boys and 4 girls). This represents a dramatic increase in the number of children killed and injured in January and February 2011 (3 children killed and 64 children injured).

Six **Palestinian boys** were killed in Gaza, including three in the buffer zone¹. Two children, ages 15 and 16, were shot and killed

Nationality	Violation	Region	Mar	Apr	Total
Palestinian	Injuries	East Jerusalem	21	30	51
		Gaza Border Area	0	6	6
		Gaza Strip	19	10	29
		West Bank	15	16	31
	Killing	Gaza Border Area	2	1	3
		Gaza Strip	2	1	3
Israeli	Injuries		0	0	0
			0	0	0
	Killing	Israel	0	1	1
	West Bank	3	0	3	

¹ The buffer zone denotes the area close to Gaza's border with Israel. The Israeli military has indicated the boundary of the no-go area to be 300 meters from the border but, in practice, it extends up to one kilometre and two kilometres at its widest point in North Gaza. The number of people directly affected is estimated at approximately 113,000 people or 7.5 per cent of Gaza's total population and 35 per cent of the arable land in Gaza (OCHA & WFP 2010: 'Humanitarian Impact of Israeli-imposed Restrictions on Access to Land and Sea in the Gaza Strip').

when they approached the barrier separating Israel from Gaza (the Israeli military has launched an investigation into the incident) and a 9-year-old child was killed in an Israeli air strike. Another 3 children (ages 10, 15 and 17) were killed in Gaza in two separate incidents as a result of Israeli military activities.

Four **Israeli children** (3 boys and 1 girl) were killed during the reporting period. A 16-year-old boy was killed when a missile launched by a Palestinian armed group struck an Israeli school bus travelling near the Barrier separating Israel and Gaza. In the West Bank, two boys, ages 4 and 11, and a three-month-old baby girl were killed when a settler family was attacked inside their home in Itamar settlement. Two Palestinians, age 17 and 19, were charged with the murder and an investigation is ongoing.

In the village of **Qatanna** (West Bank), 3 boys, ages 13, 15 and 17, were shot and injured with live ammunition fired by the Israeli Border Police in three separate incidents in March and April 2011.

The children suffered from multiple live-bullets wounds in one or more of their limbs. Two incidents occurred in the context of stone-throwing by Palestinian boys near the Barrier wall. The third incident occurred when the Border Police fired at a shepherd boy. *Source: OCHA*

Forty-four per cent of the injuries took place in East Jerusalem, with 88% of these in the neighbourhood of Silwan and 12% in the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. The high number of children injured in Silwan during clashes between Palestinian residents and Israeli forces in the context of settler activities and Israeli policies reflects the ongoing exposure of children in East Jerusalem to violations and injuries. Another 26% of injuries took place in the West Bank and 30% took place in Gaza, including 6 children injured in the buffer zone. No Israeli children were reported injured in March and April.

Of the 117 Palestinian children injured, thirty-nine children were injured in the context of military activities by the Israeli security forces. Another thirty-five children were injured in confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli forces following Friday prayers in Silwan and two other children were physically injured by Israeli forces.

Other injuries include twenty-five children injured by Israeli forces during Palestinian civil society demonstrations. Fifteen children were injured in the context of settler-related violence, including 9 injuries caused by settlers directly and 6 by Israeli forces. In addition, one child was injured in a vehicle incident in the West Bank caused by settlers.

On 8 April 2011, a nine year old boy was killed in an Israeli airstrike in the **Gaza buffer zone**. He lived with his parents and seven siblings. At around 1:00 pm, after the Friday prayer, Mahmoud went to play near his grandfather's house. Because there are no safe play areas he and his friends often played in a nearby cemetery. At around 4:30 pm, his father heard people say that *'fighters were about to fire mortar shells from among the graves on the south side of the cemetery.'* He remembered that Mahmoud was playing there so he rushed with his other son to bring Mahmoud home. When they arrived, they saw other children playing, but did not find Mahmoud. A drone plane was circling overhead. He searched and found his son's body, lifeless and dismembered by an explosion resulting from the airstrike. *Source: DCI Palestine*

ARREST AND DETENTION

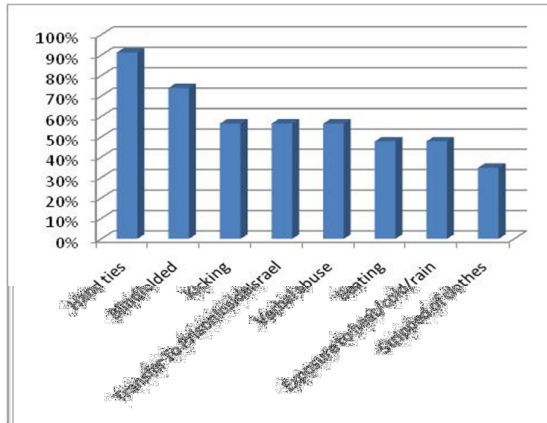
At the end of April 2011, 220 Palestinian boys between the ages of 12 to 17 years were in Israeli detention. This includes 37 boys between the ages of 12 to 15, an increase of 9% from January 2011. Currently no children are held in administrative detention.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2008	327	307	325	327	337	323	324	293	304	297	327	342
2009	389	423	420	391	346	355	342	339	326	325	306	305
2010	318	343	342	335	305	291	284	286	269	256	228	213
2011	222	221	226	220								

Source: DCI Palestine, Detention Bulletin, April 2011.

ILL-TREATMENT AND TORTURE

During the reporting period, twenty-three cases were documented of ill-treatment of Palestinian boys, age 9-17, during arrest, interrogation and detention by Israeli authorities, which at times amounted to torture. The cases involved the use of hand-ties (21 instances), blindfolding (17), kicking (13), verbal abuse (13) beatings (11), exposure to heat/cold/rain (11) and stripped clothes (8). In all instances where affidavits were taken children reported ill-treatment or torture. Thirteen children from the West Bank reported being transferred to prisons inside Israel in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Conventions.



RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN BY ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS

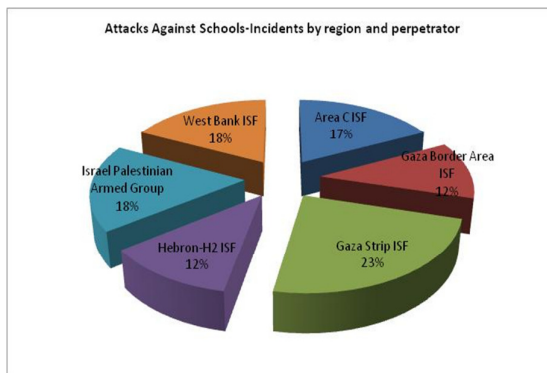
No incidents reported.

DISPLACEMENT

In March and April, 95 Palestinian structures were demolished in Area 'C' and East Jerusalem in the West Bank, including 46 homes and 49 other structures, such as animal shelters and water cisterns. As a result, 158 people, including 66 children, lost their homes. Another 269 people, including 159 children were otherwise affected by the demolitions, which impacted the community and caused threats to livelihood.

ATTACKS AND DAMAGE TO SCHOOLS

During the reporting period there was a high increase in incidents of attacks on schools, with a total of 17 incidents documented (including one new case from end of February), **affecting 3,149 Palestinian and 409 Israeli students.**



As noted above, an Israeli school bus was struck by a missile launched from Gaza by a Palestinian armed group, critically injuring a boy who later died from his injuries. In a separate incident, a Palestinian armed group fired a rocket from Gaza which landed on the roof of a kindergarten in southern Israel; no injuries were reported. In addition, a Grad rocket fired by a Palestinian armed group caused minor damage to a school fence in southern Israel.

Six other incidents involve the presence of Israeli security forces taking part in attacks, raids, forced entry, and search and arrest operations, including the use of teargas on students. During a 4 day curfew in the village of Awarta the secondary school for girls was used by Israeli forces as an interrogation centre for village residents, including children. Students from two schools in the Gaza buffer zone were evacuated due to frequent firing by Israeli forces close to the schools; in one incident the firing reached within 6 meters of the school walls and in the other incident resulted in damages to a number of classrooms. Four other incidents include the damage of 5 schools in Gaza during Israeli air strikes targeting nearby areas. Also included is a demolition order issued against a new school building in the West Bank with additional classrooms.

DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS / IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT ON ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

Access to healthcare

Children in need of specialized medical care outside of Gaza continue to face severe and at times fatal access restrictions. In March and April 2011, the Israeli District Liaison Office approved 686 out of 706 applications for children to cross Erez for medical treatment outside of Gaza. Twenty applications were delayed, no cases were denied. A 3 year old girl suffering from meningitis and related health complications died while waiting for referral to an Israeli hospital.

For more information on referral of patients from Gaza strip see: http://issuu.com/who-opt/docs/update_rad_march_2011 OR http://issuu.com/who-opt/docs/update_rad_april_2011

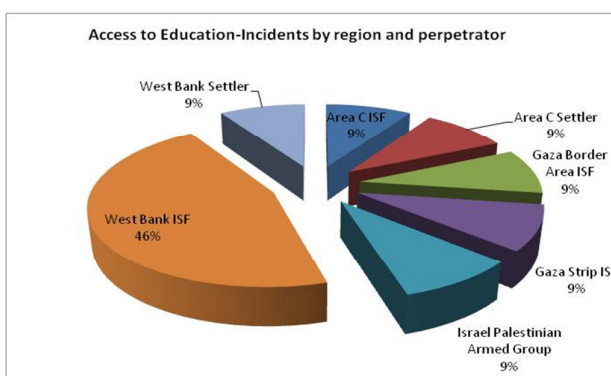
Access to education

Eleven incidents were documented (including one new case from February) in which children were denied access to education, affecting more than 160,000 children. In southern Israel, three Grad rockets fired by Palestinian armed groups in Gaza resulted in several days of school closures affecting more than 150,000 Israeli children.

In Gaza, four schools were closed as a result of escalating tension and hostilities between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups, affecting 2,123 students.

In the West Bank, a security incident between PA security forces and Israeli settlers resulted in an Israeli military incursion into Nablus City and the closure of checkpoints. Four schools were closed for one day, affecting 2,724 students, and 7 schools were closed for half a day, affecting 3,923 students. In addition, 85 teachers were denied access to schools due to closure of the checkpoints. In Awarta, a curfew resulted in the closure of 4 schools for 5 days, affecting 1,647 children.

In Silwad, close to Hebron, seven boys were detained at a checkpoint where they were reportedly hit, verbally abused and forced to remove clothing during the search. In Susiya, near Hebron, three children were attacked by settlers on their way to school during the reporting period. In addition, on several occasions, the Israeli military escort tasked to protect schoolchildren in at-Tuwani village from attacks by settlers arrived late or failed to accompany the children.



On the morning of Wednesday, 23 March 2011, three Grad rockets launched by Palestinian militants from Gaza struck in or near the cities of **Be'er Sheva, Ashdod and Ashkelon in southern Israel**, resulting in school closures that affected tens of thousands of students. On Friday 25 March, schools were closed in the four cities of Be'er Sheva, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Kiryat Gat, resulting in 150,000 students missing school on that day. Schools in Sderot and communities closer to Gaza were able to hold classes since their school buildings have been reinforced following numerous rockets attacks in recent years.

Source: *Jerusalem Post*, "Schools close in South as residents fear more rockets," 24 Mar 2011
Haaretz. "Be'er Sheva. Ashdod schools close as cross-

The case of Awarta Village

On 11 March 2011, three young Israeli children – two boys aged 11 and 4, and a three-month old baby girl - and their parents were brutally murdered in **Itamar** settlement, near the city of Nablus in the northern West Bank. The UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process declared that “there could be no justification whatsoever for such atrocities”. UNICEF condemned the murder.

Immediately following, on 12 March, Israeli Security Forces (ISF) surrounded the neighbouring village of **Awarta** and declared it a closed military zone in order to conduct a search operation for suspects. On 17 April, Israeli authorities announced the arrest of two youths from the village, aged 17 and 19, reporting they had confessed to the killings.

According to the village residents, during the five weeks prior to the arrests, Awarta was cut off from the world and its inhabitants confined at home for entire days, unable to access work or educational and medical services, as ISF engaged in house-to-house searches. “I was awakened in the middle of the night at the noise of a sound bomb, followed by heavy banging on our door and loud speaking voices ordering us to leave the house”, a 17-year old girl told UNICEF. “We were told to wait outside in the cold while soldiers were searching the house with dogs”, she added. Several of her friends reported being denied access to the bathroom for hours during house searches. The village residents reported that many homes were ransacked and damaged and some were used as a base for military operations.

Awarta mayor, Qays Awwad, said that the majority of boys and men between the ages of 16-35 were arrested and interrogated about the murders, and that many of them reported ill-treatment. About 150 women were also arrested, forced to submit DNA samples and sign documents written in Hebrew - a language none of them understands - with no access to a lawyer. The women, who were authorized to take a child or a relative to accompany them, were released after several hours. Awwad said it was the first time ISF conducted mass arrests of women in the West Bank, prompting worry among their relatives. A 16-year-old girl told UNICEF she had spent six days in detention without access to a lawyer or to her parents: “I knew my mother was close as once I heard her calling my name and asking people where I was, but I could not see her and felt terribly lonely. No one would tell me why I had been arrested.” She was later released without charges.

The head of Awarta Secondary School for girls, Nadia Odeh, told UNICEF that classes were cancelled for two weeks and that Israeli Security Forces turned the school into an interrogation centre for four days. She said that many girls were unable to access the school for another two weeks as they were confined at home by the ISF or too worried to study. Several girls said that their school books, computers, furniture and personal belongings had been damaged and sometimes confiscated by soldiers. According to Odeh, academic achievement scores have plummeted.

Several mothers told UNICEF that young children were still under stress more than two months after the launch of the search operation. “My children were very scared to see soldiers with dogs inside our home in the middle of the night”, reported a mother of seven. “One of the soldiers pointed his gun to the chest of my two-year old son. He asked the soldier not to shoot because he was in pain, before going into shock. His 13 year old brother, who was held by soldiers in the yard and interrogated while his father was away from home, still has nightmares every night. His younger siblings freeze and hide any time they hear a vehicle”, she added. Another woman said her children were scared of settlers: “Since the killings, settler attacks have been increasing in the village. As our house is located very close to the settlement, my children have seen settlers roaming around. My 6 year old boy now wets his bed at night, my 10 year old daughter refuses to let me out of her sight and their 12-year-old sister refused to go to school for several days after seeing some settlers close to home,” she said.

UNICEF is currently providing psychosocial support to 81 children and 80 mothers in Awarta through its psychosocial emergency teams led by the YMCA, with funding from ECHO. Teachers and school counselors have received support, and, 21 children have been referred for in-depth specialized counseling. Eight days of recreational activities were organized for 429 children and their caretakers, and emergency interventions were able to reach 89 families. Some members of the emergency teams have requested support for themselves, suffering from secondary trauma.