

Situation of Concern: Israel and the State of Palestine

Major developments and Context

The present bulletin covers the period 01 January 2020 to 31 December 2020.¹ The United Nations (UN) verified that 11 Palestinian children and one Israeli child were killed, and 324 Palestinian children and two Israeli children were injured in conflict-related incidents that occurred during 2020. Additionally, 96 Palestinian children seriously injured in conflict-related incidents in 2018 and 2019 were verified during the reporting period.²

During the reporting period, children in the State of Palestine and Israel continued to be affected by grave violations resulting from armed conflict including Israel's military occupation and 14th year of closure of Gaza.³ The detection of COVID-19 positive cases from late February prompted Palestinian and Israeli authorities to enact emergency measures to attempt to limit the spread of the virus. The Palestinian Authority (PA) declared a state of emergency on 05 March which remained in force for most of the reporting period. Restrictions on entry and movement, including periods of lockdown, as well as closures of educational facilities were enforced in both Israel and the State of Palestine. Both the pandemic as well as related movement restrictions and measures to contain the virus impacted the situation for children, resulting in a reduction of several categories of grave violations, but also reduced access by UN and human rights organizations to document and report on grave violations.

Killing and maiming of children

Killing

The United Nations verified the killing of 11 Palestinian children (11 boys, aged 14-17 years old) from the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem (8), and the Gaza Strip (3).⁴ These 11 children were killed by Israeli forces (IF)⁵ (8), Palestinian Security Forces (PSF) (1), Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades (1), and one boy was killed in an accident involving explosive remnants of war (1) not attributed to any party to the conflict. One 16-year-old Israeli boy from Bat Ayin settlement was also killed during the reporting period in a car accident near al-Mughayyir, Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. The accident occurred while the boy and other Israeli youth were pursued by Israeli police after they allegedly⁶ threw stones at Palestinian vehicles.⁷

Of the eight Palestinian children killed in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, seven were killed by Israeli forces (all boys, aged 15-17). The circumstances surrounding a number of the verified incidents raise concerns regarding possible excessive use of force by IF. Four incidents occurred in the context of demonstrations, arrest operations, and related clashes. On 05 February in Hebron, a 17-year-old boy was shot twice in the chest and killed while throwing a Molotov cocktail towards IF deployed on the roof of a three-story building 25-30 meters away. On 11 March, a 15-year-old boy was shot in the head with live ammunition and killed by IF at Jabal al-Arma in Nablus, during clashes after a large IF force dispersed local residents who had gathered at the site.

¹ UN verification of grave violations in 2021, including in the context of the May 2021 escalation, is ongoing. Information on grave violations in 2021 will be covered in a future bulletin.

² The CAAC Bulletin is based on information verified as part of UN monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in armed conflict, including for the annual report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict. It is published to provide additional information on trends and the impact of violations on children; to inform dialogue with parties to the conflict on measures to prevent and end grave violations of children's rights and to contribute to the evidence base informing programmatic responses for children affected by grave violations. Examples of verified incidents are included in the Bulletin; the level of detail provided regarding each incident varies according to the UN's access to primary and secondary sources to monitor the incident; information provided by those sources; and, in some instances, do no harm and security considerations.

³ Humanitarian Response Plan, Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2021

⁴ Note, the figure of 11 Palestinian children killed in 2020 does not include the death of a 14-year-old boy in Gaza on 31 January 2020 as a result of injuries sustained in October 2019, as his death was reported in the previous 2019 Bulletin, which was published after his death was confirmed.

⁵ The umbrella term 'Israeli forces' is used in the Secretary General's annual reports on CAAC and in this bulletin, to refer to Israeli military, police, and intelligence forces.

⁶ Grave violation incidents included in this bulletin are verified by the UN, unless otherwise indicated. Information that has not been fully verified is referred to as "reported", "alleged" or "subject to verification".

⁷ According to Israeli media, the other youth in the car were subsequently investigated for their involvement in the accident and death of the child, while lawyers representing the child's family allege that during the pursuit, Israeli police rammed the vehicle and caused the accident and the child's death. The exact circumstances of the incident remain under investigation at the time of reporting.

On 13 May, a 17-year-old boy was shot in the head and killed by IF while standing on the roof of a four-story building observing clashes following an IF arrest operation in al-Fawwar refugee camp in Hebron. On 04 December, a 15-year old boy was shot in the abdomen with live ammunition and killed by IF from a distance of approximately 150m, while observing clashes between IF and Palestinians from al-Mughayyir village demonstrating against the establishment of a new settlement outpost. The Government of Israel reported that military investigations were opened following these four incidents. Information on status and outcomes of investigations, and actions taken by the Government of Israel will be reported when available.

In other circumstances, on 19 August, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy was shot and killed by IF near Deir Abu Mash'al in Ramallah, while approaching a road with two other children and allegedly carrying materials to make Molotov cocktails and intending to set car tires alight on the road. On 24 October, a 16-year-old boy was killed while being restrained by Israeli Forces near Turmusayya in Ramallah. According to a witness, one soldier put his knee on the boy's neck, another tried to bind his arm behind his back, and a third struck the victim's back with his weapon, prior to his death⁸. Another 17-year-old boy was shot and killed on 21 December in the context of a shooting attack against Israeli border police in the Old City of Jerusalem. As of the end of the reporting period, Israel was withholding the bodies of six Palestinian children previously killed by IF, including three killed during the reporting period.

One incident in the West Bank was attributed to PSF, in which a 14-year-old Palestinian boy was shot in the abdomen with live ammunition and killed in Qabatiya, Jenin. The incident occurred after PSF attempted to disperse a celebration for a prisoner released from Israeli detention, during which masked residents had fired weapons into the air. The child was walking along the main road in Qabatiya and not armed nor in military attire when he was shot by PSF approximately 70m away. On 23 March 2020, a committee established by the Palestinian Prime Minister to investigate the incident issued a report holding Palestinian security forces responsible for the incident resulting in the child's death. Further information on legal or other measures in response to the incident was not reported. Information on any actions taken by the State of Palestine will be reported in the next bulletin.

Of the three children (boys, aged 14-17) from the Gaza Strip killed during the reporting period, one incident was attributed to Israeli forces, in which a 17-year-old boy was shot and killed by IF after he crossed the fence into Israel, east of Maghazi in the central Gaza Strip, along with two male adults. According to IF statements, soldiers opened fire after the group of youth allegedly threw an explosive device⁹.

One incident in Gaza was attributed to Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades (1), in which a 17-year-old child member was shot and killed while stationed at a military site belonging to the group (see details reported under Recruitment and Use).

One 14-year-old boy was also killed in Beit Lahia in the Gaza Strip, in an incident not attributed to any party, after he mishandled an unexploded ordinance he had found and brought home.

Maiming

In 2020, the UN verified a total of 326 children (324 Palestinian children, 2 Israeli children, including 313 boys and 13 girls) seriously injured by Israeli forces (294), Israeli settlers¹⁰ (20), Palestinian armed groups (2) and unidentified Palestinian perpetrators (2), and accidents involving explosive remnants of war (8) not attributed to any party to the conflict, in conflict-related incidents the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem (304) and the Gaza Strip (22). In the occupied West Bank, 35% of verified incidents of maiming attributed to IF involved children shot with rubber-coated metal bullets or live ammunition.

⁸ The IDF reported via media that the boy had fallen and struck his head. The Government of Israel reported that the incident was under examination to decide whether to launch a criminal investigation.

⁹ The UN could not independently verify circumstances of the killing. Israel's State legal adviser, in response to a petition, confirmed in a letter to a human rights organization the 17-year-old boy and two male adults who crossed the Gaza-Israel fence on 21 January 2020 were killed, and their bodies withheld.

¹⁰ In this Bulletin, 'Israeli settlers' refers to Israeli civilians who are citizens of the State of Israel, confirmed or believed to be residing in Israeli settlements established in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The UN verified two Israeli children (two girls) seriously injured in stone-throwing incidents, including a 10-year-old Israeli girl by a stone thrown at her family's car on Road 465 near Deir Abu Mash'al in Ramallah, attributed to unidentified Palestinian perpetrators. The Government of Israel reported that four other Israeli children were injured in stone throwing incidents in the occupied West Bank, and six children were injured in southern Israel when seeking shelter after rocket alert sirens.

Of the 294 Palestinian children seriously injured by Israeli forces, 15 (12 boys and 3 girls) were in Gaza, including eight boys injured during demonstrations at the Gaza-Israel perimeter fence¹¹, six children injured in IF airstrikes near their homes during conflict escalations, and one 17-year-old Palestinian boy shot with live ammunition by IF while collecting scrap from agricultural land near the Gaza-Israel fence. The remaining 279 children (275 boys, 4 girls) were injured by IF in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. 61 per cent were injured as a result of inhaling tear gas requiring medical attention¹², 25 per cent were seriously injured by rubber-coated metal bullets and 10 per cent by live ammunition fired by IF. For example:

- On 30 January in Kafr Qaddum, Qalqilya, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy was shot in the head with a rubber-coated bullet by IF, causing a severe injury to the right side of his head and partial paralysis. The Government of Israel reported that a military police investigation into the incident is ongoing.
- On 15 February in al-Issawiya in East Jerusalem, Israeli forces of the Yasam police Special Patrol unit, shot an eight-year old Palestinian boy with a sponge-tipped bullet, causing skull fractures, brain hemorrhaging and critical damage to his eye, which was subsequently removed following several surgeries. In December, the Israeli Ministry of Justice department for investigating police misconduct (MAHASH) announced it closed its investigation, and no police officers were charged in connection with the incident.
- On 10 May in al-Fawwar refugee camp, IF shot an 11-year-old boy with live ammunition, severely injuring the femoral artery in his leg and subsequently requiring two surgeries. The Government of Israel reported that the incident was under examination to determine whether to launch a criminal investigation.
- On 15 September in Al-Arrub Refugee Camp during an arrest operation, IF shot a 16-year-old boy in the face with a rubber-coated metal bullet, seriously injuring him. The child was subsequently detained and treated at an Israeli Hospital for 15 days before being transferred to Meggido prison.
- On 4 October, near the village of Hizma, an IF sniper shot a 15-year-old Palestinian boy in the head with live ammunition, resulting in a serious brain injury. The Government of Israel reported that the incident was under examination to determine whether to launch a criminal investigation.
- On 11 November near Azun Attmet village in Qalqilya, IF shot a 16-year-old Palestinian boy three times with live ammunition, without prior warning, while he was attempting to cross part of the separation Wall, injuring him in his lower abdomen, right knee and left leg.
- On 27 November in Kafr Qaddum during a weekly demonstration against settlement expansion, IF shot a 16-year old Palestinian boy in the head with rubber-coated bullet, causing him to fall and hit his head on rocks. The child suffered multiple skull fractures, brain contusions and internal bleeding.

In another example, a 16-year-old child from al-Arrub refugee camp in Hebron was physically assaulted during his arrest by IF including being slapped, punched, kicked and hit in the face with a rifle butt, resulting in a broken jaw. The Government of Israel reported that a military police investigation into the incident is ongoing. Information on status and outcomes of investigations into maiming incidents, and actions taken by the Government of Israel will be reported when available.

¹¹ Those demonstrations were to protest the US administration's peace proposal (Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People) and were due to live ammunition (4), rubber-coated bullets (3), and being hit by tear gas canisters (1)

¹² In most documented incidents, tear gas was fired in densely populated areas where children were present, or in the immediately vicinity of schools while children were present or commuting to or from school. Only incidents in which the UN confirmed that children required medical attention after inhaling gas are included in the figures above.

The UN verified 20 Palestinian children (16 boys and four girls) injured by Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank, with most incidents occurring in Hebron governorate, particularly the H2 area of Hebron city. For example, on 01 August, a 17-year-old girl was physically assaulted while carrying a baby by a group of approximately ten settlers, which included children, in Hebron's H2 area. The assault occurred in view of an IF soldier stationed at a nearby checkpoint.

In Gaza, the UN verified that two Palestinian boys were injured by a rocket launched by a Palestinian armed group during an escalation in February 2020¹³, which landed near their home east of Gaza city.

A total of eight Palestinian children (eleven boys and one girl, aged 8-16) were injured in Gaza (5) and the West Bank (3) in accidents involving unexploded ordinances, which were not attributed to any party to the conflict¹⁴.

Additionally, a total of 96 Palestinian children (92 boys, 4 girls) seriously injured by Israeli forces during demonstrations along the Gaza-Israel perimeter fence in 2018 and 2019 were late-verified during 2020.

Recruitment and use of children

The UN verified the recruitment of two 17-year-old Palestinian boys by al-Qassam Brigade (Hamas) in the Gaza Strip. On 03 May for example, a 17-year-old was shot and killed at a Hamas military site East of Jabalia. A subsequent statement by the al-Qassam Brigade claimed the victim as its member indicating he had been killed in an accidental shooting. while he was taking part in "a night guarding mission". Information monitored by the UN indicated the boy had joined al-Qassam at least four months prior to the incident.

In November, the Israel Security Agency (ISA) issued a press release reporting that two Palestinian boys aged 16 and 17 from Beit Ummar in Hebron governorate, had been recruited online by Hamas members based in the Gaza strip¹⁵. Indictments against the two children were reportedly filed in the Israeli military court in the West Bank in November 2020.

The State of Palestine committed to submit its initial state report on the implementation of the Child Rights Convention Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (CRC-OPAC) in 2022.

In testimonies received by the UN in the reporting period, four detained Palestinian boys (aged 14-16) reported that IF had attempted to recruit them as informants during their detention during 2020.

Detention of children¹⁶

According to Israel Prison Services (IPS) data, between January and September 2020 there was a monthly average of 167 Palestinian children in IPS detention¹⁷ from the West Bank including East Jerusalem for alleged security related offences, with a total of 157 children detained at the end of September, including two children held in administrative detention (1%), 93 children held in pretrial detention and/or during trial (59%), and 62 serving a sentence (40%)¹⁸. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of these children were detained in facilities inside Israel, outside the occupied West Bank. According to information provided by the Government of Israel, the number of Palestinian children detained in IPS facilities was 131 as of December 2020.¹⁹

¹³ The Palestinian Islamic Jihad was reportedly the armed group mainly responsible for rocket fire during the 24 February escalation. The UN could not independently verify which armed group fired the rocket that resulted in the boys' injury.

¹⁴ For example, on 20 November, a 13-year-old boy was hospitalized for 17 days with shrapnel injuries to the chest, face, right hand, with partial amputation of four fingers of his left hand, after an object he found while collecting scrap metal exploded. The incident occurred approximately 200 meters from the Gaza-Israel perimeter fence, east of Deir al-Balah in the Gaza Strip.

¹⁵ The press release was issued in Hebrew and English on the website of the Israel Security Agency. The two boys were reportedly arrested in the early hours of 01 October. The report stated that the children had been asked to carry out surveillance tasks for Hamas, and media reports included a photograph of items reportedly seized from the home of one of the children which included home-made pipe bombs.

¹⁶ The UN Children and Armed Conflict reporting includes children detained by all parties on security-related grounds, in the context of armed conflict. Although not covered in the reporting, Palestinian children are also detained for alleged regular criminal offences by forces of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank; by de facto authorities (Hamas) in the Gaza Strip; and by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem. Regardless of the scope of reporting, UNICEF advocates with all parties for respect of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), whereby detention of children should be only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

¹⁷ The Government of Israel provided summary (not disaggregated) figures for the months of October-December 2020. According to these figures, the average number of Palestinian children in IPS facilities were 162 for the year of 2020.

¹⁸ The number of children detained, and particularly those in pre-trial detention, detained during proceedings, or held under administrative detention without charge, raises concerns regarding the principle enshrined in the CRC that detention of a child should be a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

¹⁹ Further disaggregated data was not available.

According to Israel Police data, 367 Palestinian children were arrested in East Jerusalem in 2020. The UN supported the provision of legal assistance to 283 children (including one girl) aged between 12 and 17 years-old who were arrested in East Jerusalem for security related offences²⁰, including 121 children from the al-Issawiya neighbourhood. The UN documented nine cases of children aged 14 to 17 years from East Jerusalem under open-ended house arrest.

According to Israel Police data, a further 486 Palestinian children were arrested in other parts of the occupied West Bank in 2020. The Government of Israel reported that 295 indictments were filed against Palestinian children in Military Courts in the West Bank during 2020, of which 89% were for security-related offences, compared to 395 indictments in 2019. The UN documented four children from the West Bank held on administrative detention orders²¹ during 2020,

In mid-January, Israeli authorities moved 33 Palestinian child detainees from Ofer prison in the West Bank to Damon prison in northern Israel, increasing the population of minors detained at Damon and the proportion of Palestinian children detained outside the occupied Palestinian territory. Children moved to Damon complained of poor conditions, including poor hygiene, humidity, scarce ventilation and access to daylight, poor quality food and water. Some reported being subjected to beatings and harsh disciplinary measures including solitary confinement and deprivation of family visits when they protested against being moved. The Government of Israel reported that the children's protests included removing doors, damaging walls of their cells and cursing and throwing food at IPS personnel. Regarding conditions at Damon, the GOI additionally reported that in November 2020 a review was done which included nutrition, education, medical care, social workers intake, and training of the staff to work with youth.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2020 Israel enacted emergency regulations to prevent transmission of the virus in prisons. Those measures included suspending family visits to detainees, including children, as well as lawyers' access to clients except via phone and prior to and after hearings; and holding hearings remotely using audio-visual equipment, while suspending some court proceedings. Starting from April 2020 the IPS began implementing isolation periods for new detainees including children, before transferring them with other detainees. On 02 April, following a petition filed before Israel's High Court of Justice (HCJ) by human rights organizations, the IPS granted detained Palestinian children access to regulated phone calls²² during the Covid-19 emergency on a fortnightly basis, although this access was not granted consistently across all detention facilities. The emergency regulations suspending family visits and in-person access to lawyers officially expired on 18 June 2020, however the IPS continued to partially enforce restrictions throughout the reporting period. A UN joint statement noted the health risks to children in detention and impact of these restrictions on the situation of detained children: *"This creates additional hardship, psychological suffering, and prevents the child from receiving the legal advice to which they are entitled. For children awaiting trial, these pressures could put them under increased pressure to incriminate themselves, pleading guilty to be released faster."* The statement further called for release of children from detention and a moratorium on new admissions into detention facilities²³. The Government of Israel reported that in the first months of the pandemic the military prosecutor in the West Bank in some instances sought plea bargains for some detained Palestinian children to conclude their cases sooner, though this required the children in question to plead guilty to offences with which they were charged.

²⁰ Three additional boys aged between 9 and 11 years – below the age of criminal responsibility under Israeli civil law – were also verified to have been detained, all of whom received legal aid services.

²¹ I.e., detained on security grounds and without being charged, for periods ranging from three to six months, after which an administrative detention order may be renewed for the further term or the child is released. Of the four documented cases, two children were released from administrative detention during the course of 2020.

²² The IPS allowed detained minors a call a pre-approved first-degree relative once every two weeks for up to ten minutes on speaker, in the presence of a prison warden who understands the language and who could stop the call for security reasons (Israel Prison Service, Rules regarding security prisoners: Supervised telephone calls to minors during the period of emergency, issued 01 April 2020). Following the expiry of emergency regulations restricting family visits in June, some detention facilities continued to grant minors telephone access while others did not.

²³ <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/light-covid-19-crisis-un-officials-call-immediate-release-all-children-detention-including>

Palestinian Children in Israeli Detention Facilities (Source: IPS)

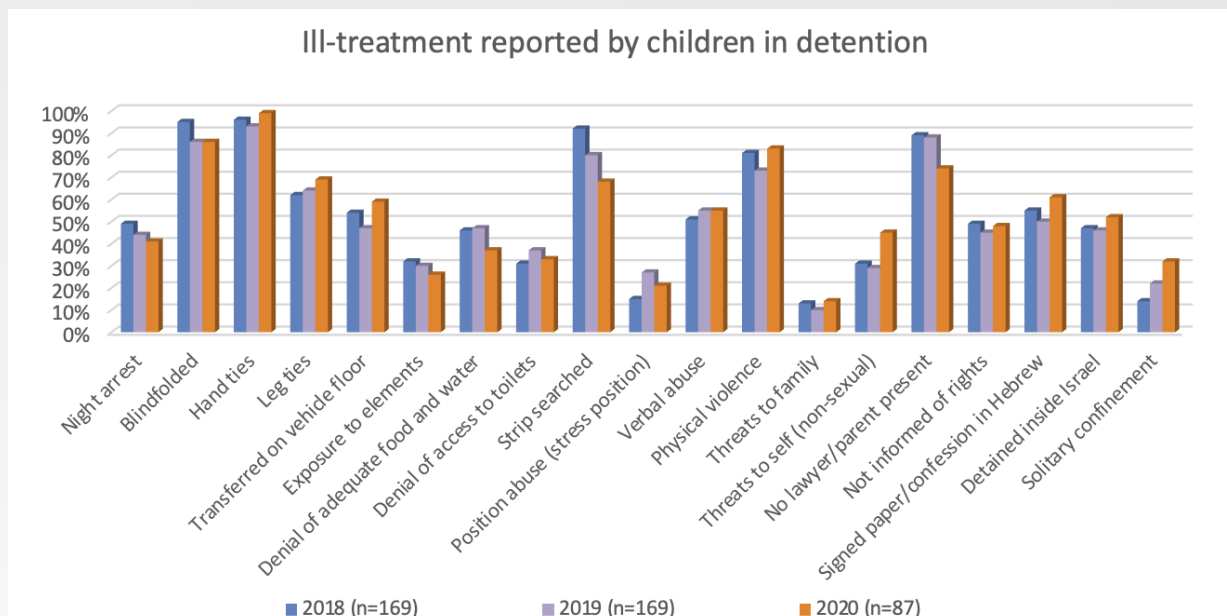
Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Avg
2011	221	216	224	217	211	207	201	176	162	150	159	132	190
2012	166	183	203	218	231	220	210	194	189	164	177	193	196
2013	219	234	236	236	223	193	195	180	179	159	173	154	215
2014	183	210	202	196	215	202	192	201	182	163	156	151	188
2015	163	182	182	164	163	160	153	156	171	307	407	422	219
2016	406	438	444	414	332	300	343	319	271	285	284	275	343
2017	301	297	289	303	331	318	304	297	325	318	313	352	312
2018	351	356	304	315	291	273	251	239	230	220	217	203	271
2019	209	205	215	205	201	210	210	185	188	185	182	186	198
2020	183	201	194	168	142	151	154	153	157				167

Ill-treatment, including breaches of due process, during arrest, transfer, interrogation, and detention by Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), Israeli Police, the Israeli Security Agency, and the IPS continued to be reported in testimony by a substantial proportion of interviewed children. The UN documented 87 cases of boys (aged 12-17 years old) in East Jerusalem (9) and elsewhere in the West Bank (78), who reported different forms of ill-treatment and breaches of due process, including the following:

- 36 children (41% of those who provided testimonies) were arrested from home at night during planned arrest operations.
- 53 children (61% of those who provided testimonies) reported that they had to sign a document in Hebrew, a language that they do not understand.
- 75 children (86% of those who provided testimonies) reported that they had been blindfolded during transfer from the place of arrest and that they remained blindfolded sometimes even during interrogation.
- 86 children (99% of those who provided testimonies) reported that they were handtied upon arrest, including 61 children (71%) who reported that a painful method of hand-tying was used, 60 children (69%) reported being leg-tied, and 51 (59%) that they were transferred on the floor of a vehicle.
- 72 children (83% of those who provided testimonies) reported that they endured physical violence, including slapping, punching and kicking during arrest, transfer, interrogation and/or detention.
- 53 children (61% of those who provided testimonies) reported that they were verbally abused and intimidated during arrest, transfer, interrogation and/or detention.
- 42 children (48% of those who provided testimonies) reported not being adequately notified of their legal rights, in particular the right to counsel and the right to remain silent.
- 28 children (32% of those who provided testimonies), aged between 13 and 17 years, reported that they had been held in solitary confinement during interrogations, i.e. held in a cell alone for periods ranging between three and 32 days, without daylight, and purposely no access to other children simultaneously held in detention, family or lawyer.²⁴

²⁴ This includes cases in which children were held in solitary confinement while undergoing an interrogation by the Israel Security Agency (ISA, or "Shabak")

- 64 children (74% of those who provided testimonies) reported that neither a parent nor a lawyer was present prior to²⁵ their interrogation.
- 32 children (37% of those who provided testimonies) reported that they were not provided with adequate food or water and 29 children (33% of those who provided testimonies) reported that they were not given access to toilets during the initial stages of detention, particularly at stages of arrest, transfer and interrogation.
- 23 children (26% of those who provided testimonies) reported that they were exposed to outside elements during the initial stages of detention, particularly at stages of arrest, transfer and while being held prior to interrogation. This includes children being arrested and forced to stay outside during cold or hot weather for prolonged periods of time, including sometimes on their knees and/or hand-tied.
- 39 children (45% of those who provided testimonies) reported that they had been threatened in order to confess, during transfer and /or interrogation.
- 12 children (14% of those who provided testimonies) reported threats of harm to their family members during interrogation.



Abduction of children

No incidents were verified. One incident of attempted abduction by Israeli settlers near Turmusayya, Ramallah was documented by the UN, in which a group of three settlers, at least one of whom was armed, attempted to seize a two-year-old boy.

Education-related incidents

In 2020, 102 education-related incidents were verified in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem (98) and the Gaza Strip (4), compared to 257 incidents in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic and related closures and safety measures significantly reduced the physical presence of students in and around schools during the reporting period²⁷, and verified

²⁵ None of the children whose testimony was analyzed by the UN reported a parent or lawyer being present during interrogation.

²⁶ Education-related violations are reported here in accordance with UNSCR 1998 and subsequent guidance note (2014) available under:

<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/AttacksonSchoolsHospitals.pdf>. The Guidance Note explains that: "The general notion of attacks on schools and hospitals will be further disaggregated for monitoring and reporting purposes into "education-related" and "health care-related" incidents" while noting that "not all acts affecting education and health care during armed conflict are violations of international law". The Note further suggests the following breakdown for education-related incidents: attacks on schools; attacks on educational personnel; threats of attacks; military use of schools; and other interferences with education.

²⁷ Following detection of first COVID-19 positive cases, and state of emergency declared in State of Palestine on 05 March, authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip ordered the closure of all schools, day care and educational facilities effective from 06 March until the end of June, with some schools opening on a limited basis for Tawjihi examinations between 30 May and 17 June. In Gaza, all schools opened on 08 August for a 'remedial education month' but closed on 25 August following detection of the first community-transmitted COVID-19 cases in Gaza. Throughout State of Palestine, the start of the 2020/2021 school year was delayed to 06 September, when schools re-opened with blended learning approach, mixing in-person and distance learning. Individual classes and entire schools were affected by further closures ranging from one to ten days in response to suspected or positive COVID-19 cases. Approximately 200 schools in the West Bank including East Jerusalem were affected by some form of COVID-related closures.

incidents were documented only during specific periods when schools were open. Interferences impacting children's access to education documented when schools were open included clashes and the use of tear gas and other weapons in and around schools; checkpoints and other access restrictions for students and teachers; threats and intimidation of school children and teachers by IF and settlers; as well as a climate of fear and tension in and around some schools due to military presence. Conflict escalations including airstrikes and rocket fire also hampered safe access to education for children in Gaza and southern and central Israel during the reporting period.

In the Gaza Strip, the UN verified three attacks in which schools were damaged by IF airstrikes, reportedly on armed group' military sites in response to rockets fired towards Israel by Palestinian armed groups. For example, on 13 August two schools were damaged in IF strikes, reportedly on armed groups' military sites, in Beit Hanoun and Al Shati camp, affecting 1,781 pupils. In one of these incidents, an unexploded Israeli missile was subsequently found in one of the affected elementary schools.²⁸

In the West Bank, eight incidents entailing attacks (1) and threats and intimidation against protected personnel (7) by IF (5) and Israeli settlers (3) against teachers and/or pupils were verified.²⁹ For example, on the night of 28 January Israeli settlers broke in and spray-painted threatening slogans on the exterior walls of Einyabous Elementary School for Boys in Nablus governorate, and set a fifth-grade classroom on fire, damaging the room and school materials.

The United Nations verified one incident of a school used for military purposes in Gaza by unidentified perpetrators, and a further 89 incidents of other interferences with education by IF (85 violations) and Fatah's Tanzim (4 violations), affecting 8,819 Palestinian children³⁰, were verified in the West Bank. Nearly three quarters of all verified interferences with education in the West Bank involved either IF firing live ammunition, tear gas, or sound grenades in and around schools, mostly in the context of clashes and military operations (22 incidents, 26%), or lost school time as a result of IF closures and denial of teachers' and students' access through checkpoints (39 incidents, 46%). For example on 26 February, IF fired six tear gas canisters into a school in Bethlehem Governorate, causing three tear gas inhalation injuries among students that required medical intervention. Schools continued to face threats of demolition and/or confiscation by IF, with nine (9) incidents verified of schools in the West Bank including East Jerusalem in which school materials were confiscated or schools received demolition and/or stop-work orders. For example, on 28 December, the Israeli Civil Administration issued a demolition order against a donor-funded kindergarten under construction in Hammamat al Maleh, intended to serve 60 students from three communities. According to information provided by the Government of Israel, the demolition order was issued on the basis that the school was constructed in an area designated as an archaeological site.

In the four incidents attributed to Fatah's Tanzim, individuals claiming to be members of the Tanzim, wearing masks and carrying clubs and sticks, entered four schools in Hebron governorate and ordered the principals to dismiss students and teachers due to planned Palestinian demonstrations, resulting in the loss of part of a school day for 1,829 students.

Fewer disruption to children's education in Israel and Gaza as a result of conflict escalations were monitored in 2020, due to lower frequency and duration of escalations, and the closure of educational facilities as part of COVID-19 measures.

²⁸ One of the affected schools closed for three days, resulting in loss of access for that period for its 1,781 students. The other school was still able to conduct classes following the damage, so its 1,274 students were not included in the total number of children 'affected'. These two schools were in operation prior to the attacks - most schools in Gaza had opened on 8th August for the start of the school year, before closing again on 24th August as part of COVID-19-related restrictions following increased detection of cases in Gaza.

²⁹ During the reporting period, threats and other interferences with education were verified affecting the Urif Secondary School in Nablus. For example, on the morning of 15 January, approximately 40 Israeli settlers gathered outside the Urif Secondary school in Nablus, accompanied by dozens of IF personnel, some of whom pointed their firearms at the school principal and threatened to shoot him if any clashes occurred around the school. The UN has verified education-related incidents affecting the Urif secondary school since 2012. See for example: Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary General, S/2013/245, 15 May 2013, paragraph 118.

³⁰ Affected by IF interferences: 6,990; affected by Tanzim interferences: 1,829.

On 24 February, during an escalation in which Palestinian armed groups fired rockets towards Israel and IF carried out strikes in Gaza, schools in Israeli towns near Gaza were reportedly closed for the safety of students and educators³¹. Schools in Gaza remained officially open, although many children reportedly did not attend. During the reporting period, instances of incendiary balloons released from Gaza which flew or landed in the vicinity of schools in southern Israel were reported on media and in social media.

Health-related incidents

In Gaza, one attack by IF resulting in damage to a children's hospital in was verified. The facility was not directly hit. On 26 December an IF airstrike following two rockets fired from Gaza towards Israel resulted in minor physical damage to the of Al-Durra Children's Hospital in Gaza city, including a large piece of shrapnel from a missile that fell inside the Emergency Department.

In the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, 18 incidents of threats (3) or attacks (15) against health personnel by IF (17) and Israeli settlers (1) were verified, resulting in the injury of at least 18 health personnel. For example, during the early morning of 30 August, after a search operation and ensuing clash with Palestinian youths, IF fired tear gas and stun grenades in the immediate vicinity of the Alia government hospital in Hebron, resulting in approximately 25 hospital personnel and COVID-19 patients being treated at the hospital suffering from smoke and gas inhalation. In another verified example, on 11 December a paramedic was kicked, beaten with rifle butts, and pepper strayed by IF while providing first aid to injuries during a demonstration and clashes in Kafr Malek village. In another incident, on 27 December, IF fired rubber bullets and approximately 15 stun grenades and tear gas canisters at an entrance of the Palestine Medical Complex Hospital in Ramallah, resulting in an injury to a hospital security guard.

Five other interference with delivery of health care by IF in the West Bank including East Jerusalem were verified. For example, on 24 November several IF soldiers forcibly boarded a Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) ambulance to attempt to arrest an injured person being provided first aid; tear gas was also fired at the same ambulance while its team were providing emergency medical services to injured persons inside the ambulance. A further 14 incidents in which IF delayed or prevented the delivery healthcare were verified in the West Bank, in which a direct impact on children was not documented.

Denial of humanitarian access for children

Two incidents of denial of humanitarian access by Israeli forces were verified in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, in which medical and other emergency services were prevented from reaching seriously or fatally injured children.

At least 659 children in need of specialized medical care outside of the Gaza Strip faced delays and denials when accessing health services as a result of Israeli authorities' delay or denial of their travel permits. Additional children may be denied access via Israeli authorities' delay or denial of permits for their accompanying adult relatives or the non-approval of financial support from the Palestinian Authority.

Erez: In 2020, 2,096 applications for children to cross through the Erez terminal for medical treatment outside of the Gaza Strip were submitted to Israeli authorities via the Palestinian Health Liaison Office³² and the temporary WHO-facilitated coordination mechanism³³. Of these, 1,437 applications (69%) were approved without delay (compared to 5,460 out of 7,564 applications (72%) in 2019). 587 (28%) applications were delayed³⁴ while 72 (3%) were denied (affecting 397 boys and 262 girls), compared to 357 denied child applications in 2019. According to information provided by the Government of Israel, authorities received a total of 2,621 applications in 2020 for children to exit Gaza leave for medical purposes, and 1,918 were approved³⁵.

³¹ In the Israel-SOP Situation of Concern, precautionary closures of education facilities by relevant authorities have been widely reported but not counted as education-related violations in past reporting cycles. The above examples are included here for context on how armed conflict impacts education of children in The Gaza Strip and southern Israel.

³² This office ceased coordination during the period of the PA's suspension of coordination with Israel from 19 May to 24 November.

³³ Functioning between September and November 2020.

³⁴ "Delayed" permit applications refer to those receiving no definitive response from Israeli authorities by the time of a patient's hospital appointment. According to the process for health referrals outside of Gaza, a patient receives a doctor's recommendation for referral for treatment outside of Gaza; medical approval of the referral; financial approval of the referral; and an hospital appointment for the needed treatment, prior to submitting application for a permit to exit Erez to travel to location of medical care. Permit applications normally need to be submitted 23 working days in advance of the appointment, however urgent cases are processed faster. In some cases, the applications included in the 'delayed' category above subsequently received approval, after a hospital appointment was lost due to the delay.

³⁵ The Government of Israel did not report further on the 703 applications for children (27%) that were not approved, according to its data.

During 2020, the number of referrals by the Palestinian Ministry of Health for treatment outside of Gaza dropped sharply after March in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic³⁶. Adding further barriers for children in need of access to life-saving medical treatment outside of Gaza, between 19 May and 24 November, the Health Liaison Office of the Palestinian MOH ceased coordination of permit applications and movements for patients, companions and ambulances out of Gaza as a result of the PA's decision to suspend coordination with Israel, in response to Israel's possible annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank. During the six-month period of suspension, no formal coordination mechanism was maintained for Palestinian patients needing to exit Gaza for lifesaving treatment in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, and Israeli hospitals. Several health providers and non-governmental organizations supported Palestinian patients' and companions' permit applications on an ad hoc basis during this period, while a WHO-facilitated temporary coordination mechanism was initiated from September 2020, until the Health Liaison Office resumed coordination on 24 November. In 2020, during the period of coordination suspension, the UN documented three cases in which children in Gaza died while waiting for coordination of permits and travel to access health care outside of Gaza.

Demolition and displacement

In 2020, the UN verified 767 demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures by Israeli authorities (765) and Israeli settlers (2) in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, displacing 725 people including 380 children. Another 2,585 children were affected by the demolitions, through reduced access to basic services and impact on their livelihood. Of the 767 demolished and seized structures, including 155 donor-funded structures, 667 (87%) were in Area C, 93 (12%) were in East Jerusalem, and seven structures (1%) were punitively³⁷ demolished (2%). Most of the remaining demolitions occurred on the grounds of lack of building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to acquire³⁸. Out of the 767 demolished structures, 133 structures were Palestinian inhabited residencies and 634 other structures, which included uninhabited residential, agricultural and livelihood structures. A further 90 structures in East Jerusalem (85), Area C (3) and Area A (2) were self-demolished by Palestinian owners due to the threat of fines and cost of demolition imposed on Palestinians for demolitions carried out by Israeli authorities.

The Government of Israel reported that the IDF enacted a policy at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that included not enforcing demolition orders on inhabited building and prioritizing enforcement of demolition orders on new structures. According to UN data, demolitions continued and increased during the period of the COVID-19 emergency³⁹. In September, the Humanitarian Coordinator issued a statement noting the increase in demolition activity in the period from March to August 2020, further exposing affected Palestinian civilians to the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic; and highlighting that the destruction of property in occupied territory is prohibited by IHL unless absolutely necessary for military operations⁴⁰. In November, following a major demolition of more than 76 structures in the Palestinian community of Humsa Al Bqai'a which displaced 73 people including 41 children, the Humanitarian Coordinator ad interim issued a statement reminding parties that extensive destruction of property and forcible transfer of protected people in an occupied territory are grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention and calling on Israel to halt unlawful demolitions⁴¹.

³⁶ As of the fourth quarter of 2020, the number of permit applications submitted to Israeli authorities for children to exit Gaza for health care stood at less than one third of the number of applications submitted in the first quarter of the year (457 permit applications for children in Q4 2020 compared to 1,504 applications in Q1 2020).

³⁷ I.e. residential structures demolished following acts of violence against Israelis by the owner or a resident of the property, where the demolition is authorized by the IDF Military Commander based on article 119 of the 1945 Defense (Emergency) Regulations, officially on grounds of deterring future violence. The demolition orders are subject to review of Israel's High Court of Justice. For further information on punitive demolitions see: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, A/HRC/44/60, 15 July 2020, paras. 38-52.

³⁸ <https://unsco.unmissions.org/security-council-briefing-situation-middle-east-delivered-special-coordinator-mladenov>

³⁹ For example, the UN documented 273 demolitions in January to June 2020, compared to 493 demolitions in the period from July to December, an 80% increase.

⁴⁰ See: <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/unlawful-demolitions-west-bank-spike-during-covid-19>

⁴¹ See: <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-witnesses-largest-demolition-years>. The Government of Israel reported that the area was designated as a Firing Zone by the Israel military in 1972 and this was the reason for the prohibition on civilian presence and the execution of the demolition orders.