



Factsheet:

Israel Abuses of Child Fishers in Gaza: The Need for Protection

The Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) continue to impose restrictions on Palestinian fishermen, limiting their fishing zone to three nautical miles. This limitation prevents fishermen from their right to work and has diminished their source of income and thrown them into dire poverty. The IOF also continues its systematic attacks on fishermen, frequently pursuing and arresting them and destroying their fishing equipment.

Gazan fishermen are considered the poorest social group in the Strip. In 2010, poverty among fishermen was estimated at 90%, up from 50% in 2008¹. Under Israel's siege of Gaza unemployment has raised dramatically and the fishers' community has been living under extreme poverty, pushing many Gazan children to work in the fishing sector. The estimated number of children working in the fishing sector is about 190.² Most of those work with their families, who usually cannot afford to hire adult, professional fishermen due to their difficulties. Subject to live fire and other attacks by the IOF, child fishers risk their lives on their small vessels and are constantly subjected to fear and panic, which affect their mental development. According to Al Mezan's documentation, since the beginning of 2010 the IOF has carried out about 113 attacks against fishermen. As a result of these attacks, 11 people were injured; including two child fishers.



The IOF continues to arrest Palestinian fishermen, including children. The IOF typically forces fishermen to take off their clothes, jump into the sea, even in the cold winter water, and swim towards Israeli vessels. The IOF also handcuffs the fishermen with plastic straps, blindfolds them, and interrogates them in Israeli detention centers. According to Al Mezan's documentation, since the beginning of 2010 the IOF has arrested 66 fishermen, including seven children.

¹ International Committee of the Red Cross, "Gaza closure: not another year!", news release no. 10/103, 14 June 2010, [online](#).

² All child fishers are believed to be over 16 years old. Of them 113 are registered and approximately 70 are working without registration, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery in Gaza.



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In his affidavit to Al Mezan, ‘Allam Nasser Fadel Baker, 17, who was working with his relatives onboard a fishing boat when subjected to Israeli gunfire and detention, stated that:

“At around 7:30 am on Tuesday 11 September 2011, while I was working with my uncle Hasan Khader Baker, who suffers from heart disease, and his sons, Hasan, Ja’far, and Mohammed, when we had reached a point opposite Al Waha Resort and were ready to start fishing, suddenly I saw an Israeli military boat moving quickly from the north towards us. Then I saw another Israeli boat traveling alongside it. The soldiers who were on the boats opened heavy fire on us.

“My cousin Khader switched on the engine on the hasaka [a small fishing boat] and sailed quickly to the south. The Israeli boats continued to pursue us while firing heavily. When the Israeli boats came near to us, I heard a voice on an amplifier shouting “Stop, stop!” Water was showering over us from all the shooting. I was lying on the floor of the hasaka. I was afraid. There was heavy fire and I was afraid to die.



“Suddenly the hasaka stopped. Khader told us that the engine had been hit and it was broken. I saw the Israeli boat in a position opposite ours, and heard a voice shouting “Who is the captain?” Ja’far replied. One of the soldiers ordered Ja’far to stand at the bow and to take off his clothes. I saw ten soldiers on the boat, dressed in green military uniforms. I know these are the uniforms of Israeli soldiers. At that moment I saw my uncle Hassan lying on his back on the deck of the boat. One of the Israeli soldiers ordered us over an amplifier to take off our clothes. We shouted and told him that my uncle suffers heart disease. The soldier ordered us once again to take off our clothes, to jump into the water, and to swim towards an inflatable rubber boat near the military ship.

“We begged him again. He ordered us again to jump in the water and leave the hasaka. We jumped into the water, one after another, and swam to the inflatable rubber boat. When I reached it a soldier cuffed my hands behind my back with a plastic strap. It was hurting me a lot. He also blindfolded me and ordered me to kneel. I felt the boat was moving. I was shivering from the severe cold and the air which was blowing against my chest.

“An hour later, the boat stooped. I felt a soldier untie the cuffs and undo the blindfold. The soldiers then took us to a big military boat. One of the soldiers gave me some black clothes to wear. Then he handcuffed me and blindfolded me again. I felt the boat moving. It stopped after nearly 30 minutes. The soldiers untied my hands and made me get off the boat with my eyes blindfolded. They took me to a harbor platform. When I stepped down onto the harbor platform, I knew that I was at Ashkelon harbor, as I had been detained there before.



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“Two soldiers handcuffed and blindfolded me and took me somewhere else. I looked out from under the blindfold and saw that I was inside a room. I stayed in the room for about five hours. At one point during my time there, I was led to another room where a doctor examined me. They asked me for my personal information. My uncle and his sons were in the same room and I chatted with them. I heard my uncle’s voice asking the soldiers to untie his hands and undo the blindfold. He told them that he could not bear the situation. I was blindfolded and handcuffed the whole time. I had severe pain in my hands due to the handcuffs.

“During my time there I also heard the voices of my cousins Mohammed Suhail Baker and Mohammed Majed Baker, and the voice of another one of my relatives, Khalil Jawhar Baker. They told us that they had been near us when we were arrested. I was in the room for about five hours. Then the soldiers untied the plastic cuffs and handcuffed us again with iron ones. They led us to a vehicle, I guess it was a car. I felt it moving, and after 40 minutes it stopped. Five minutes later, a soldier made me get out of the car. He untied my hands and undid the blindfold. I found myself at the Erez crossing gate.

“Two young men dressed in civilian clothes took Khalil Jawhar Baker, Mohammed Suhail Baker, Mohammed Majed Baker, and myself to a path. They led us to a small room under the ground, then took the others one by one to another room. I was left alone. After about 30 minutes, Mohammed Majed Baker and Mohammed Suhail Baker were led back to the first room. They took the three of us to the crossing hall, where they made us sit in chairs. I felt hungry. I asked the two men who were standing near me to bring me food. One of them said “Be quiet,” and gestured to me to keep silent. Thirty minutes after our arrival at the hall, they took us outside. They let us out of the gate to Gaza. At approximately 6:00 pm on the same day, we left the crossing. At approximately 9:00 pm, my other relatives were released”.

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