

Friday July 18, 2014

Children's rights and aid organisations call for immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip as violence escalates

Thursday night, on July 17, the Israeli government approved the expansion of its military operation in the Gaza Strip and launched a ground incursion. This follows 10 days of heavy airstrikes and shellings by Israeli forces which have killed 266 Palestinians and injured over 1,700, the majority civilians. This new development is likely to dramatically increase the already high level of violence and suffering of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, particularly in the case of children.

Third states are obligated under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, to hold Israel accountable for grave breaches, including disproportionate use of force, and to uphold its duties as an occupying power, as stipulated under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In the past 10 days of violence, 56 Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli fire, and a further 521 have been injured. Of the 56 children, at least 42 of them are 12 years old or younger. So far, more children have been killed by Israeli fire than Palestinian militants. These numbers do not reflect the psychological trauma of Gazan children and their families, who live under constant fear in the midst of heavy bombings and without access to safe places or shelters. In addition, the constant accumulation of explosive remnants of war constitutes an increasing threat to the lives of children, especially boys who are always the main victims of accidents. According to early assessment, an estimated 57,900 children in Gaza urgently need direct and specialized psychosocial support.

In each of the three major military operations that Israel forces undertook in the last six years, Palestinian civilians and children have borne the brunt of the violence; in operations Cast Lead in 2008-2009 and Pillar of Defense in 2012, a total of 382 Palestinian children were killed. The violence has also left Gazans and children in particular traumatized and in need of psychological support. This violence is exacerbated by the blockade on the Gaza Strip imposed by Israel since 2007, which has led to a humanitarian crisis for the 1.7 million Palestinians that live in the Strip. Past military operations by Israeli forces are proof that military escalation and violence won't bring forth stability, security and peace in the region, and only strengthen radicalism and further antagonize the different parties. The solution to the current situation is diplomatic and will only be reached when the different parties reach a long-term agreement.

We the undersigned call for an immediate ceasefire that also ends the blockade of the Gaza Strip. Until such an agreement is reached, the undersigned stress that it is imperative that there is full compliance by the rules of international law.



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