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Israel/Occupied Territories: Palestinian armed groups must not use children

Amnesty International reiterates its calls to Palestinian armed groups to put an immediate end to the use of children in armed activities.

“Palestinian armed groups must not use children under any circumstances to carry out armed attacks or to transport weapons or other material”, Amnesty International said.

On 22 May 2005 a 15-year-old Palestinian child carrying explosive was arrested by the Israeli army at the Huwara military checkpoint, at the entrance to the West Bank town of Nablus.

This is the third such incident this year in which Palestinian children have been arrested at Israeli military checkpoints while carrying explosives or munitions. On 3 February a 17-year-old was arrested at the same checkpoint while carrying explosives and bullets, and on 27 April two 15-year-olds also carrying explosives and bullets were arrested at a military checkpoint at the entrance of the West Bank town of Jenin.

Several Palestinian armed groups, including the *al-Aqsa* Martyrs' Brigades, an offshoot of the ruling *Fatah* party, *Hamas*, *Islamic Jihad*, and the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), have used children to transport explosives and munitions, thereby endangering their lives. In some cases these groups have sent children to carry out suicide attacks.

On 1 November 2004 a 16-year-old Palestinian from the West Bank town of Nablus carried out a suicide bombing which killed three Israeli civilians in a Tel Aviv market. He was the youngest Palestinian to carry out such an attack. The PFLP claimed responsibility for the attack. The boy's family condemned those who used their child for the attack.

Palestinian armed groups have repeatedly shown total disregard for the most fundamental human rights, notably the right to life, by deliberately targeting Israeli civilians and by using Palestinian children in armed attacks. Children are susceptible to recruitment by manipulation or may be driven to join armed groups for a variety of reasons, including a desire to avenge relatives or friends killed by the Israeli army.

In recent years, Palestinian children have borne the brunt of the suffering caused by the conflict and have frequently been the victims of Israeli army attacks in the Occupied Territories. More than 600 Palestinian children have been killed and thousands have been injured by the Israeli army in the past four and a half years (1). Some 25 have been killed this year alone. Hundreds of thousands of others have been prevented from going to school and effectively confined to their homes by Israeli army blockades and curfews. Others have repeatedly been attacked on their way to school by Israeli settlers who continue to carry out such attacks with impunity.

Thousands of Palestinian children have been arrested by the Israeli army and hundreds are currently detained and accused of security offences. Many of those detained have been ill-treated or tortured by Israeli forces and some have been forced or pressured to become “collaborators” with Israeli intelligence services. Such practices by Israeli forces violate international human rights and humanitarian law.

“The exploitation of children, who are often particularly vulnerable or traumatized, by armed groups and armed forces must cease at once, as must the killing of children, and those responsible for such crimes must be brought to justice”, said Amnesty International.

(1). In the same period 108 Israeli children and have killed and hundreds of others injured by Palestinian armed groups in deliberate attacks against Israeli civilians in Israel and in the Occupied Territories.

