

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Israel/Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority: Killing of children under scrutiny at UN**

More than 250 Palestinian and 72 Israeli children have been killed in Israel and the Occupied Territories in the past 23 months. When the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child meets to consider Israel's periodic report on Tuesday October 2, Amnesty International calls for a new mindset among Israelis and Palestinians to prevent the killing of more children.

*Killing the Future: Children in the Line of Fire*, a new report issued today by Amnesty International details the way in which Palestinian and Israeli children have been targeted in an unprecedented manner since the beginning of the current *intifada*.

"Children are increasingly bearing the brunt of this conflict. Both the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and Palestinian armed groups show an utter disregard for the lives of children and other civilians, Amnesty International said today.

"Respect for human life must be restored. Only a new mindset among Israelis and Palestinians can prevent the killing of more children."

The impunity enjoyed by members of the IDF and of Palestinian groups responsible for killing children has no doubt helped create a situation where the right to life of children and civilians on the other side has little or no value.

"Enough of unacceptable reasons and excuses. Both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority must act swiftly and firmly to investigate the killing of each and every child and ensure that all those responsible for such crimes are brought to justice," the organization stated.

The international community should heed the call by Amnesty International and scores of other NGOs for international monitors to be sent to the region. The Israeli government should stop refusing the presence of international monitors. Amnesty International believes that had observers been present in the region since October 2000, their presence may have saved the lives of Israeli and Palestinian children as well as other civilians.

### **Killings of Palestinian children**

The majority of Palestinian children have been killed in the Occupied Territories when members of the IDF responded to demonstrations and stone throwing incidents with unlawful and excessive use of lethal force. Eighty Palestinian children were killed by the IDF in the first three months of the *intifada* alone.

Sami Fathi Abu Jazzar died on the eve of his 12th birthday after being shot in the head by a live bullet fired by Israeli soldiers into a crowd of mostly primary school children. The shooting took place in the aftermath of a stone throwing demonstration. Six other children were injured by live fire in the same incident. Amnesty International delegates were present in the crowd at the time and concluded that the lives of the soldiers were not in danger.

In the past year Palestinian children have been killed when the IDF randomly opened fire, shelled

or bombarded residential neighbourhoods at times when there was no exchange of fire and in circumstances in which the lives of the IDF soldiers were not at risk. Others were killed during Israeli state assassinations, when the IDF destroyed Palestinian houses without warning, and by flechette shells and booby traps used by the IDF in densely populated areas.

The large numbers of children killed and injured and the circumstances in which they were killed indicates that little or no care was taken by the IDF to avoid causing harm to children.

Dina Matar, two-months-old and Ayman Matar, 18-months-old, were among nine children killed on 22 July 2002 when the IDF dropped a one ton bomb from an F-16 fighter jet on a densely populated area of Gaza city. The bomb killed 17 people. The aim of the attack was to assassinate a leading *Hamas* activist, who was among those killed. The following day Israel's Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon called the attack "one of the most successful operations".

A number of Palestinian children have also died after being held up at IDF checkpoints, and delayed or even prevented from passing through to reach hospital. At least three children have been killed by Israeli settlers. In most cases the IDF does not intervene to protect Palestinians from Israeli settlers, who literally get away with murder.

### **Killings of Israeli children**

Israeli children have been killed by armed Palestinian groups both in the Occupied Territories and inside Israel. The first Israeli child killed in this *intifada* was killed in January 2001 near Ramallah, in the Occupied Territories. About 70 percent of the victims were killed by Palestinian suicide bombings and others were killed in shootings and other bomb attacks on cars or public buses.

In the last 18 months there has been a marked increase in attacks on Israeli civilians and an increasingly high number of victims have been children. In the first seven months of 2002 alone, 36 Israeli children were killed by Palestinian armed groups, 19 in Israel and 17 in the Occupied Territories.

On 1 June 2001 a suicide bomber blew himself up among a group of young people waiting to enter the "Dolphinarium" night club. Twelve of the 21 people who were killed were aged under 18. Among the victims were 14-year-old Maria Tagilchev, outside whose school a car bomb had exploded two days earlier and 15-year-old Yevgenia Keren Dorfman, who sustained serious brain damage and died 18 days later.

The *'Izz al-Din al Qassam Brigades*, the armed wing of the Palestinian Islamist group *Hamas*, claimed responsibility for the bombing and pledged to carry out further attacks.

Twelve people were killed and more than 50 were injured by a suicide bomber on the 2 March 2002. The bomb was detonated next to a group of women waiting with their children, for their husbands to leave the nearby synagogue. Those killed included two sisters Shiraz Nehmad aged 6 and her two-year-old sister Liran, their four cousins Lidor and Oriah Ilan aged 12 years and 18 months and Shaul and Avraham Eliahu Nehmad aged 15 and 17.

The full text of the report is available at: <http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/mde020052002>

### Public Document

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