

Summary of the UN Commission of Inquiry's Report on Palestinian Children:

“The essence of childhood has been destroyed”

The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel examines Israel's deliberate targeting of Palestinian children since 7 October 2023 (A/HRC/62/CRP.2, Human Rights Council, 62nd session). The Commission documents the killing of at least 20,179 children and the injury of 44,143 more, and concludes that Israel has committed genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Its findings are based on its own investigations, verified video footage, medical testimony and the statements of Israeli officials and soldiers.

1. Deliberate Targeting of Children

- The Commission found a consistent pattern of children deliberately targeted by the Israeli security forces: shot while evacuating with their families, in shelters and displacement camps, and at food distribution sites, including Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) sites. In none of the investigated cases did the children pose any threat.
- Precision weapons were used: quadcopter drones with high-resolution cameras and snipers using the Israeli-manufactured DAN .338 rifle. Doctors treated many children with single gunshot wounds to the head or upper body. Documented cases include a 10-day-old baby shot by a quadcopter while being breastfed, a 15-year-old boy shot dead while holding a white flag, and a two-year-old girl shot in the back of the head in the West Bank.
- Israeli officials have publicly depicted Palestinian children as “terrorists”. The deputy speaker of the Knesset stated that “every child born there is already a terrorist, from the moment of his birth”; a former Knesset member declared that “every child, every baby in Gaza is an enemy”.
- The killing of children continued after the October 2025 ceasefire, notably around the ill-defined “yellow line”, which the Commission describes as a death trap for children.

2. Serious Bodily and Mental Harm

- Gaza now has the highest concentration of child amputees in the world; over 1,000 children lost limbs in the first three months alone, many amputated without anaesthesia. An estimated 10,000 children suffer hearing loss, leaving many unable to hear evacuation warnings.
- Over 1,655 children have been detained in the West Bank since October 2023, many in administrative detention without charge. The Commission documented torture, including electrocution, beatings and attacks with dogs. A 17-year-old boy died in Megiddo Prison from severe, prolonged malnutrition — which the Commission finds amounts to the war crimes of torture and wilful killing.
- Sexual violence against children in Israeli detention is found to be “not exceptional but a systematic, state-enabled assault on their bodies and their dignity”.
- By March 2026, UNFPA reported that 96 per cent of children in Gaza felt that death was imminent; suicidal thoughts are common. An estimated 58,554 children have lost one or both parents, and 17,000–18,000 are unaccompanied or separated. Doctors coined the term “Wounded Child, No Surviving Family” for injured children arriving alone at hospitals.

3. Conditions of Life Calculated to Destroy

- Health system: all three paediatric hospitals in Gaza were forced to close within the first two months of hostilities. Attacks on neonatal intensive care units had reduced the number of incubators from 178 to 54 by November 2024 already; by August 2025, newborn bed capacity had been halved, denying an estimated 2,500 infants access to critical newborn care.
- Reproductive harm: miscarriage rates increased by up to 300 per cent; livebirths declined by 41 per cent; about a third of babies born January–June 2025 were premature or underweight; by March 2026, 70 per cent of newborns were classified as underweight.
- Starvation as a method of war: in August 2025 the IPC confirmed famine in Gaza — the first ever officially confirmed in the Middle East. Children were left to drink contaminated water. Diseases such as polio have re-emerged.
- Education: 459 of 564 school buildings were directly hit, and children in Gaza have missed three years of formal education; 79 per cent of higher education campuses were severely damaged or destroyed.
- Displacement: at least 1.9 million people — about 90 per cent of Gaza's population — were forcibly transferred within the Gaza Strip.

4. Legal Findings

The Commission finds on reasonable grounds that the Israeli authorities and security forces have continued to commit the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in the Gaza Strip, and war crimes in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Specifically:

- War crimes: wilful killing; torture and inhuman and degrading treatment; intentionally attacking civilians, including children; destruction of property; and outrages upon personal dignity.
- Crimes against humanity: extermination, murder, torture, other inhumane acts, enforced disappearance and age-based persecution of children, particularly boys.
- Genocide: the Commission finds three categories of underlying acts of genocide fulfilled with respect to children: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction. These correspond to Article II(a), (b) and (c) of the 1948 Genocide Convention.

5. Genocidal Intent (Dolus Specialis)

- The targeting of children is central to establishing genocidal intent: “Children are not just part of a population; their survival is central to the existence and continuity of the Palestinian group.”
- Intent is inferred from the pattern of conduct — the sheer number of documented cases of direct targeting, its continuation despite warnings and binding ICJ orders, and the foreseeability of the harm.
- The Commission concludes that much of the harm suffered by Palestinian children “was not incidental but intended to destroy the existence of the Palestinians in Gaza as a group”, forming part of “a deliberate strategy to destroy the future of the Palestinians in Gaza by targeting their children”.
- The Commission names specific Israeli divisions, brigades and units it finds may be responsible for individual killings and injuries of children.

Conclusion

The Commission concludes that Israel, as occupying power, has deliberately inflicted death and severe bodily and mental harm on hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children, “irreparably destroying the sanctity of childhood”. It recommends that Israel immediately halt military operations and comply with the ICJ’s binding orders, and it urges all states to fulfil their obligations under Article I of the Genocide Convention: to prevent genocide, to arrest persons subject to ICC arrest warrants, to cease all transfers of arms and jet fuel to Israel, and to prosecute suspected perpetrators under universal jurisdiction. It further calls on the UN Security Council to prohibit military trade with Israel and impose sanctions on those in command responsibility.