Third General Assembly (GA3)

Protecting the rights of children in the region of Palestine

Research Report

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"Out of this world"

Forum: Third General Assembly (GA3)

Issue: Protecting the right of children in the region of Palestine

Position: Chair

Introduction

The ongoing conflict in the Palestinian territories has brought about severe implications on the lives and welfare of children. According to UNICEF, children in the Palestinian region face daily exposure to violence, restriction in access to basic resources, and interruption of their right to education, health care, and basic security (UNICEF, 2022). This has been compounded by the political instability in the region with its attendant violent clashes between Israel and Palestinian territories, spawning large-scale humanitarian challenges that affect children more than adults.

This issue is given priority by various UN resolutions. For instance, it is guided by the CRC, which calls for the protection of all children from violence and exploitation. The rights of their development and well-being are to be guaranteed. In addition, due to the intensity of conflicts and the frequency, children in this region have a higher risk factor in experiencing trauma, thus which calls for international attention and intervention (UN, 1989).

The role of the United Nations:

The UN is vocal on the protection and promotion of the rights of children in areas of conflict, including Palestine. The UNCRC is one important document adopted in 1989, confirming the commitment of the global community to the rights of children, among them rights to safety, health, education, and protection from abuse (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). It has been the UN, or more particularly UNICEF, that has supplied emergency humanitarian support in conflict areas in an effort to provide security of access to education, psychosocial care, and basic healthcare for children affected (UNICEF, 2021).

In Palestine, too, the UN has taken up a number of initiatives targeted more precisely at mitigating the effects of the protracted conflict on children. UNICEF, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) work together in monitoring, reporting, and acting on child rights violations. These agencies work in the difficult environment of bringing educational materials, psychological services, and other necessary provisions right to the doorsteps of Palestinian children displaced, impoverished, or exposed to uncontrolled violence (UNRWA 2022; OHCHR 2021).

Despite these efforts, the UN's interventions are often limited by resource constraints, political obstacles, and access restrictions imposed by ongoing hostilities. Additionally, political challenges within the UN General Assembly and Security Council, such as member states' differing stances on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, impact the extent of direct intervention and support available to Palestinian children (International Crisis Group, 2021). The UN continues to call for a two-state solution and has emphasized the importance of addressing humanitarian needs without political bias to uphold the rights of children in all affected regions.

Definition of Key Terms

Child rights:

Basic rights provided for in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which encompasses survival, development, protection, and participation rights (UN, 1989).

OPT:

Occupied Palestinian Territories: Territories such as the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip, under Israeli military occupation as determined by various UN resolutions (UNESCO, 2019).

Humanitarian assistance:
This refers to aid provided by organizations to both alleviate suffering, improve the welfare of affected populations, and protect civilians in conflict zones (OHCHR, 2021).

Protection of civilians:
International humanitarian law which protects civilians, particularly children, against the effects of armed conflict, based on their right to protection and care (ICRC, 2020).

Trauma and psychological impact:
The mental and emotional agony that children go through in these sorts of conflicts can cause long term psychological trauma, resulting in PTSD and depression among them (Save the Children, 2020).

Accountability and justice:
Legal and political mechanisms established to ensure the prosecution of individuals or groups responsible for human rights abuses, particularly against children (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

General Overview

Why Child Rights Protection in Armed Conflict Is Important
Children constitute one of the most vulnerable populations in any society; in a war zone, the vulnerability is aggravated. The risks that Palestinian children face include exposure to direct violence, psychological trauma, and the loss of educational opportunities. Children's rights need to be safeguarded to ensure their safe development and access to healthcare and opportunity for a future free from fear and violence.

Key Challenges Faced by Children in Palestine

Exposure to violence and conflict
With the intensification of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, unprecedented levels of violence have been brought upon children in the region. Reports by UNICEF (2021) indicate that children were regularly caught in crossfire, with many being killed or maimed by airstrikes, ground skirmishes, and attacks on civilian infrastructure. The traumatic experiences leave a lasting impact on their mental health and social development.

Restricted access to education
Education is a basic right for every child, but the tensions of war in the Palestinian territories are constantly obstructing school life. The physical damage caused to schools by military presence and restrictions results in attending school being unsafe and sometimes impossible. The UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) points out that up to 25% of Palestinian children have irregular schooling because of these challenges (UNRWA, 2020).

Healthcare and psychological support
The healthcare system in Palestine, especially in Gaza, is under-resourced and overstretched. Children bear the brunt of limited access to medical treatment, especially for chronic conditions and injuries resulting from conflict. Further, the intifada (rebellion) has brought widespread psychological impacts of conflicts, such as PTSD and severe anxiety, among children, with mental health services largely unavailable (WHO, 2021).

Social and economic impact
Unemployment and poverty rates in the Palestinian territories are among the highest in the world, which affects the ability of families to provide for children. Further, economic instability is feeding into food insecurity, lack of basic needs, and poor living conditions, all of which have dire consequences for

children's health and development (World Bank, 2022). Mid-2023 the overall poverty rate in Palestine was 32.8%, in Gaza this rate stood close to 64% (World Bank, 2024).

International Legal Framework and Children's Right

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of the most comprehensive frameworks for child protection in the world. Articles 6, 24, 28, and 38 of the CRC specifically call for measures to ensure survival, health, education, and protection for children in situations of conflict (UN, 1989). Additionally, the Fourth Geneva Convention establishes protections for civilians, including children, during times of war and occupation, obligating states to uphold these principles even amid hostilities (ICRC, 1949).

Source: https://www.redbridgescp.org.uk/professionals/un convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child/

Major Parties Involved

Israel

The policies of the Israeli government and military significantly affect Palestinian children's rights and their daily life. As the occupying power in the West Bank and Gaza, Israel uses restrictions to movement via checkpoints, curfews, and border closures, which limit access to basic services, including health and education, for Palestinians (B'Tselem, 2022). Moreover, military activities and security operations in the Palestinian territories often affect children's safety, including reports of injury and death and psychological trauma among young people owing to the violence (UNICEF, 2021)

Palestine

In the Palestinian territories, the protection of children's rights by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas is limited by governance and internal challenges. The PA in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza face significant challenges in addressing the health, education, and safety needs of children under occupation, economic blockade, and infrastructural constraints (World Bank, 2022). While Palestine has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, implementation is held back by a lack of resources and the negative impacts of the blockade on Gaza (United Nations General Assembly, 1989; Save the Children, 2020).

United States of America

The United States is the main ally of Israel and, therefore, holds a prominent position in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. U.S. foreign aid and military assistance to Israel impact the balance of power, often shaping policies that affect the welfare of Palestinian children. Reductions in U.S. funding for Palestinian support programs in recent years have had significant consequences for humanitarian aid, including healthcare and education services for children in the region (International Crisis Group, 2021).

While the U.S. government publicly encourages a peace process, its longstanding alliance with Israel, coupled with recent changes in funding dynamics, has a continued impact on child welfare initiatives in the Palestinian territories (Mitnick, 2020).4 United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

UNICEF

On the ground in the Palestinian territories, UNICEF works to support the protection and development of children, with a focus on education, psychological support, and health programs. UNICEF's reports bring international attention to the needs and rights of Palestinian children, calling for increased humanitarian support (UNICEF, 2021).

Save the Children

Save the Children has supported children in conflict areas across the globe with essential services. In Palestine, it has focused on education, mental health care, and primary healthcare while advocating for the protection of children from violence and exploitation (Save the Children, 2020).

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The ICRC works to protect civilians affected by armed conflict, ensuring that international humanitarian law is upheld. In Palestine, the ICRC provides essential medical aid and works with local partners to protect children's rights and welfare (ICRC, 2020).

Timeline of Events

1948 Establishment of Israel and displacement of Palestinian families, leading to the first Palestinian refugee crisis (UN, 1948).

1967 Six-Day War leads to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, significantly impacting the lives of Palestinian children in these territories (UN, 1967).

1989 Adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), including specific protections for children in conflict (UN, 1989).

2007 Intensified conflict between Israel and Hamas, leading to increased casualties and humanitarian needs, especially among children (UNRWA, 2007).

2014 The Gaza War results in hundreds of child casualties and large-scale displacement in Gaza (UNICEF, 2014).

2021 Renewed conflict and airstrikes in Gaza exacerbate the humanitarian crisis, highlighting the urgent need for child protection (OCHA, 2021).

Possible Solutions

Increase access to education and safe learning environments

Safe and protective learning environments are crucial for Palestinian children to overcome the disruption of education by conflict. Conflict-free areas for schools and training educators in trauma sensitive approaches can help keep children at school despite challenges from outside (UNESCO, 2019).

Strengthen healthcare and psychological services

International donors and NGOs could come together to increase funding for mental health services and healthcare infrastructure. Potential interventions for the acute healthcare and psychological needs of the children would be mobile health clinics and mental health counseling (WHO, 2021).

Advocate for legal protections and international accountability

Strengthening international accountability mechanisms to monitor violations against Palestinian children's rights is critical. The UN could consider appointing a special rapporteur specifically to monitor child rights in conflict zones, including Palestine (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Economic support and development programs

The provision of economic support to families can play a role in reducing child poverty and improving living conditions. Microfinance programs for poor families provide resources that can be used to support and protect children (World Bank, 2022).

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