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Stripped, beaten and blindfolded: new research reveals ongoing violence and abuse of Palestinian children detained by Israeli military

Ramallah, 10 July –Palestinian children in the Israel military detention system face physical and emotional abuse, with four out of five (86%) of them being beaten, and 69% strip-searched, according to new research by Save the Children. Nearly half (42%) are injured at the point of arrest, including gunshot wounds and broken bones. Some report violence of a sexual nature and some are transferred to court or between detention centres in small

cages, the child rights organisation said.

The new research comes as the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 presents evidence today to the Human Rights Council on Palestinian children in detention. It is estimated that there are between 500 and 1000 children held in Israeli military detention each year.

Save the Children says these practices are a major and long standing human rights concern and is calling for the Government of Israel to end the detention of Palestinian children under military law and their prosecution in military courts.

Save the Children and a partner organisation consulted 228 former child detainees from across the West Bank, detained from between one and 18 months, and found that most children are beaten, handcuffed and blindfolded during arrest. They are also interrogated at unknown locations without the presence of a caregiver, and are often deprived of food, water and sleep, or access to legal counsel, according to the research. The main alleged crime for these detentions is stone throwing, which can carry a 20-year sentence in prison for Palestinian children.

Khalil*, who was detained when he was 13, said that he did not receive essential healthcare:

“I had an injury in my leg, I had a cast, and had to crawl to be able to move. I felt my body being torn apart. I had no canes to help me walk, I kept asking soldiers for help during the transfer, but no one helped me.”

The new research follows Save the Children’s 2020 report [“Defenceless”](#) and finds that the impact of physical and emotional abuse during detention has soared, with profound consequences on children’s ability to recover.

Khalil* continued: *“The soldier threatened to kill me when he arrested me for the second time. He asked me, ‘Do you want the same fate as your cousin?’ as he had been killed. He promised me that I would have the same fate and die, but that he would send me to prison first. He told me that he’s coming back for me – and every day, I wait for that day to come.”*

Some children reported that they believed different types of abuse were intended to push them to admit things that were untrue in order to incriminate others, including family members.

Yasmeen*, the mother of Ahmed* detained when he was 14, said: *“During interrogation, they convinced Ahmed* to tell on his brother in exchange for his release. He was naive and didn’t understand what was happening. He said what they told him to say; a few days later, they came to our house and arrested my other son.”*

Save the Children’s new consultation showed that:

- During arrest, 42% of children were injured, including gunshot wounds and broken bones, and 65% of children were arrested during the night, mostly between midnight and dawn. Half of all arrests took place in the children’s home.
- The majority of children experienced appalling levels of physical and emotional abuse, including being beaten (86%), being threatened with harm (70%), and hit with sticks or guns (60%).
- Some children reported violence and abuse of a sexual nature, including being hit or touched on the genitals and 69% reported being strip searched.
- 60% of children experienced solitary confinement with the length of time varying from one 1 day to as long as 48 days.
- Children were denied access to basic services, 70% said they suffered from hunger and 68% said they didn’t receive any healthcare.
- 58% of children were denied visits or communication with their family while detained.
- The majority of children detained are boys – a trend reflected by the survey, with boys representing 97% of the respondents.

Children are increasingly unable to fully return to their normal life following release from detention, with the number of children having frequent nightmares rising from 39% to 53% and those suffering from insomnia or difficulty sleeping rocketing from 47% to 73%, compared to the children surveyed in 2020.

Lana* the mother of Mohammed* who was detained when he was 14, said: *“After my son was released, he wanted to stay by my side and sleep next to me.”*

He refuses to leave the house. It has been a challenge for us; I feel that he is traumatized. He was arrested Tuesday night, now every Tuesday he feels they are coming for him.”

Save the Children’s research also showed how children’s care and hope for the future decreased from 96% in 2020 to 68% in 2023, an alarming increase in a context with limited psychosocial support available.

Jason Lee, Save the Children’s Country Director in the occupied Palestinian territory, said:

“Each year approximately 500-700 Palestinian children come into contact with the Israeli military court system; they are the only children in the world to experience systematic prosecution in military courts. Our research shows – once again - that they are subject to serious and widespread abuse at the hands of those who are meant to be looking after them.

“There’s simply no justification for beating and stripping children, treating them like animals or robbing them of their futures. This is a child protection crisis that can no longer be ignored. There must finally be an end to this abusive military detention system.”

Save the Children is calling on the Government of Israel to respect all children’s rights and international law. No children should be prosecuted in military courts or any court that lacks comprehensive fair trial rights and juvenile justice standards. Save the Children is calling for an immediate moratorium on Israeli military authorities arresting, detaining and prosecuting children.

ENDS

Talesperson

Jason Lee, landchef för Rädda Barnen i de ockuperade palestinska områdena finns tillgänglig för intervju. Kontakta Rädda Barnens presstjänst.

NOTES TO EDITORS

A note on the methodology:

In total, 228 former child detainees participated in this study by Save the Children and YMCA. This includes 177 children who responded to surveys and 51 who took part in focus group discussions. A further two focus group discussions were held with parents whose children had been detained. All child participants were between the ages of 12 and 17 years old when they were detained and were between the ages of 15 and 21 when they took part in the study. All of these children were detained in the past three years, with the majority, 71%, detained in the past year.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, including surveys and focus groups, was applied, to ensure that the perspectives and experiences of Palestinian children who experienced arrest and detention were at the core of the study. Their experience aligns with the assessment of Military Court Watch and suggests that the vast majority of UNICEF's 38 recommendations to ensure a system in line with international juvenile justice standards and international law, have not been substantially implemented.

You can find Save the Children's 2020 report on Palestinian children in detention, *Defenceless*, [here](#).

Save the Children has been working with Palestinian children since the 1950s, with a permanent presence in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) since 1973. Our team works across the oPt, with over 30 partners, to ensure children survive, have a chance to learn, are protected from all types of abuse, and that all actors remain committed to fulfilling the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. Since our founding more than 100 years ago, we've changed the lives of more than 1 billion children. Around the world, we give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. We do whatever it takes for children—every day and in times of crisis—transforming their lives and the future we share.

**Name has been changed to protect anonymity*

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