

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
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Oral Statement submitted by:
Defence for Children International, NGO with special ECOSOC status

Child fatalities as a consequence of Israel's military operation "Cast Lead" in the Gaza Strip, ongoing since 27 December 2008

Thank you Mr. President

The purpose of our statement today is to illustrate for the Council, the devastating impact of the conflict in Gaza on children.

As of January 9th 2009, the UN quoted figures of approximately 800 dead and at least 3,300 injured since the beginning of the full scale Israeli military offensive in Gaza on 27 December 2008. **According to DCI-Palestine estimates, at least 158 children have been killed in the operation, although UN agencies report over 250 child fatalities.**

On Monday, December 29th, an Israeli missile struck a mosque in Jabalia camp. The missile completely destroyed a bedroom in an adjacent house, killing five sisters asleep inside. They were aged 17, 13, 12, 7 and 4.

On Tuesday, January 6th, three Israeli artillery shells were launched towards an UNRWA school, also in Jabalia camp. The school was being used as a shelter and over 40 civilians, including 14 children, were killed. The UN strongly condemned the attack, saying their schools in Gaza are all flying the UN flag, and that the GPS coordinates of all of UN buildings had been communicated to Israel beforehand.

Israel claims that this latest military operation aims to stop Hamas rocket fire into Israel, which had killed two Israeli civilians in 2008 before the start of the offensive. Undoubtedly, the indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel by Palestinian militants is illegal and should be condemned. Nevertheless, Israel's offensive is not only grossly disproportionate, but it clearly fails to distinguish between military and civilian targets.

Today, we ask ourselves if the killing of at least 800 Palestinians, including 158 children, really is an issue of self-defence for Israel. We cannot see how this slaughter, combined with the blockade imposed on Gaza, can make Israel or the Middle East safer. Above all, we ask ourselves why the international community is not taking action as Israel wilfully creates a humanitarian disaster that aid agencies can no longer contain, and as it bombs a locked-in territory just over half the size of Lake Geneva, where 56 per cent of the 1.5 million people are children.

We stand in this room on behalf of the children of Gaza, as we have many times before, and we want an end to the killing. We urge the Human Rights Council to:

- Issue recommendations for Israel to (i) cease its military offensive immediately, (ii) allow the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance to Gaza, and (iii) permanently lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip to allow the free flow of goods and services.
- Condemn Israel's war crimes, and the lack of proportionality of its response to rocket fire.
- Dispatch a fact-finding mission to Israel and Gaza to carry out investigations into each incident involving child fatalities during operation "Cast Lead", and recommend that those found responsible for war crimes be prosecuted.