

# PERSEVERANCE DESPITE GENOCIDE

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## YOUNG CHILDREN UNDER CRISIS AND WAR: NURTURING HEALTH, EDUCATION, PROTECTION, AND RESILIENCE IN PALESTINE

### Background

For over a decade, Palestinian children have endured unimaginable hardships – they have faced displacement, injury, disease, hunger, and the devastating loss of family members and communities. The recent escalations in Palestine have brought severe violations of child rights and international law, resulting in unprecedented suffering for the entirety of its population, particularly the children of Gaza.

The average teenager in Gaza, for example, has grown up amidst multiple wars, witnessing and experiencing profound trauma. Even before October 7, the majority of children in Gaza carried deep psychological scars, suffered from poor physical health and inadequate nutrition, and had their socio-emotional well-being and educational opportunities severely disrupted.

The ongoing war on Gaza has intensified the suffering of its children to an unprecedented level. All of Gaza's one million children are grappling with profound physical, emotional, social, and cognitive challenges that will haunt them for a lifetime. As of 1 July, nearly 38,000 Palestinians have been killed, of whom at least 15,000 are children and 746 are healthcare workers, and tens of thousands of others have been injured. More than 20,000 children have

been orphaned or left unaccompanied and alone, and an average of 10 children are losing limbs each day.

The destruction of Gaza's infrastructure has also left them in the most dire conditions, deprived of essential care components, including health, nutrition, safety, security, and education. A total of 103 health facilities have been damaged or destroyed, including 32 hospitals, and 119 schools severely damaged, including 65 UNRWA schools attacked or vandalised. Nearly all of Gaza's children are displaced, lacking basic necessities, and facing the imminent threats of disease and famine. Since the onset of the war, education has been halted and learning facilities destroyed, eliminating opportunities for learning and intellectual growth. Moreover, many children are living in overcrowded shelters and on the streets, where they face constant threats of violence, exploitation, and starvation. Many are forced to work to support their families, and some must take care of younger siblings after losing both parents.

Despite all these challenges, Gaza has repeatedly shown that it is its own greatest supporter and lifeline, exhibiting remarkable resilience and an ability to survive in the face of oppression. The children of Gaza have particularly demonstrated extraordinary resilience, continuing to play and learn even amidst unimaginable trauma and instability. The people's love for life has enabled them to persist in their efforts, supported by local organizations and NGOs that have mobilized to deliver emergency aid, including food, medical supplies, and psychological support. This resilience is crucial in helping Gaza endure and overcome extreme adversity. However, current initiatives are under immense strain due to the overwhelming needs and limited resources available.

The occupied West Bank has also fallen victim to increasing violence and escalations. Despite this, the challenges of children in the West Bank have been largely overlooked. Children in the West Bank face shortages of adequate food and water, disrupted education, exposure to violence, and disrupted family systems. Up until mid-May, 124 children were killed by Israeli forces and settlers in the West Bank. With daily raids and attacks on cities and refugee camps, constant violence, clashes, military sieges, and displacement, nowhere is safe for Palestinian children.

With all that is going on in the region and its effect on the holistic development of young children, the world is left with a critical question: what will the future hold for the children of Palestine?

### **Impact of Crisis and War on the Holistic Development of Young Children**

The ongoing war in Gaza has had profound effects on the ECD status and infrastructure in the region:

- **Educational Disruption:** The destruction of schools and educational infrastructure has disrupted children's access to quality education, hindering their academic progress and future opportunities.
- **Psychological Trauma:** Children in Gaza have been suffering from severe psychological trauma due to their exposure to violence, loss, and displacement, impacting their cognitive, emotional, and social development without adequate mental health support.

- **Healthcare System Strain:** The collapse of the healthcare system has resulted in inadequate access to essential healthcare services, contributing to higher rates of morbidity and mortality among children.
- **Nutritional Challenges:** Food insecurity and malnutrition have persisted, leading to chronic malnutrition during children's early years of life, which can cause stunted growth, cognitive impairments, and lifelong health problems.
- **Displacement and Instability:** Ongoing displacement and instability have disrupted families and communities, increasing social and economic vulnerabilities and risks of exploitation, abuse, and neglect for children.
- **Harassment and Violation of Rights:** Children face arrest and interrogation by Israeli occupation forces, along with other violations of their basic rights.

## **Symposium for Young Children in Palestine**

Recognizing the dire needs of the children of Palestine, the Palestinian and Arab Networks for Early Childhood Development, in partnership with the Jordanian National Council for Family Affairs, call for a symposium for young children affected by the ongoing crisis.

The two-day symposium, organized by Juzoor for Health and Social Development, aims to gather national, regional, and international stakeholders to address the profound impact of the ongoing crisis and war on children and early childhood in Palestine, particularly in Gaza, and develop coordinated responses to address their immediate and long-term needs.

### **Symposium Objectives:**

#### **1. Highlight Current Situation of Young Children in Palestine**

- Shed light on the current status of early childhood care, development, and education in Palestine and raise awareness about the urgent issues facing children and families.
- Share personal stories to rehumanize the suffering of children and caregivers, emphasizing their resilience and strength.
- Showcase current ongoing responsive activities and interventions by Palestinian organizations in Gaza and the West Bank to support early childhood care, development, and education.
- Address child rights violations in Palestine, particularly Gaza, and discuss ways to enhance child protection in conflict zones.

#### **2. Include Lessons Learned and Transfer of Effective Practices**

- Integrate lessons learned from previous experiences and expertise in dealing with similar crises globally, allowing for the transfer of best practices.
- Highlight successful strategies and interventions from other conflict-affected regions to inform and improve the current response in Palestine.
- Showcase Palestinian resilience and introduce approaches distinctive to circumstances and challenges in Palestine, with particular emphasis on Gaza.

#### **3. Mobilize Solidarity and Advocacy for Children**

- Encourage organizations to redirect their humanitarian programs towards addressing the emergency situation in Gaza, emphasizing the critical importance of immediate and targeted interventions.

- Advocate for regional and international solidarity and the rights of children in Palestine
  - Coordinating efforts and mobilizing resources among stakeholders and national and international organizations.
  - Work with and strengthen local institutions and structures that provide early childhood support and services for young children and their caregivers.
- 4. Highlight Anticipated Long-term Impact**
- Discuss the immediate and long-term impacts of the war on early childhood care and development status and infrastructure, highlighting the critical need for sustained support and investment in rebuilding efforts.
- 5. Engage International Partners and Donors**
- Outline the expectations and needs from international partners and donors, emphasizing the importance of their support in complementing with initiatives of local organizations in Gaza.

**Where and When?**

The symposium will be held on July 30-31, 2024 at the Kempinski Hotel in Amman, Jordan.