

JOINT STATEMENT ON PROTECTING CHILDREN IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY AND ISRAEL

This war on children must stop. Anything less will forever be a stain on our collective conscience. 22 organisations are urging the EU to call for the respect of international humanitarian law and an immediate ceasefire by all parties as the number of children being killed continues to rise.

Children are always the first to suffer in any conflict – the stories coming out of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory are truly harrowing. Children are paying the highest price for a conflict they have no part in. With every airstrike, rocket, and bullet fired, children's sense of security is ripped away yet again, with dire consequences for their long-term wellbeing.

We are deeply alarmed by reports of Israeli children being abducted and taken hostage by Palestinian armed groups in Gaza. Under no circumstances are children to be treated in a cruel or harmful manner. We condemn all acts of violence against children in the strongest terms. All children held hostage must be unconditionally released, immediately.

As of 17 October at least 1,000 Palestinian children have been killed in Gaza, and 18 in the West Bank, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health. We are appalled by the attack on Al-Ahli Arab hospital that took place on the 17th of October and which has reportedly killed at least 500 civilians, with many reported to be women and children sheltering from air raids. At least six people were also killed when an UNRWA school was hit in al-Maghazi refugee camp, in central Gaza. We condemn these attacks in the strongest possible terms and call for the respect of international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure from attack. Attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals where children are seeking refuge, are beyond unconscionable.

Moreover, the UN states that water, food, fuel, medical supplies, and even body bags, are running out due to the siege. The UN warns that people – particularly young children – will soon start dying of severe dehydration.

Despite the evident needs, we are concerned that aid to support Palestinian children affected by this ongoing conflict is at risk of being suspended. Children and their families enduring this conflict across the region have never needed support more. It is estimated that 80% of the population in Gaza relies on international aid to survive and access basic services and that refugees represent 70% of the total Gaza population. In the West Bank, foreign aid is essential for services, like education and primary health care, to be delivered. Suspending aid is cutting a critical lifeline to an incredibly vulnerable population and would have dire consequences for children.

We welcome the EU's commitment to increase the EU's humanitarian budget for the response as we need humanitarian assistance to be scaled up to meet the demands. However, what we need more than anything is for the violence to stop. **Without an end to fighting – without a ceasefire – hundreds of thousands of children's lives hang in the balance.**

We urge the EU to protect these children by speaking in one united voice and:

- Call for an immediate ceasefire by all parties in the conflict.
- Unequivocally call on all parties to respect international Humanitarian Law, commit no further Grave Violations against children and ensure that there is accountability for those committed to date.
- Ensure the immediate, unconditional release of all civilians deprived of liberty, most urgently children, pregnant women and mothers with infants and young children, the wounded, elderly and sick held captive by armed groups in Gaza;

- Ensuring full and unfettered humanitarian access to allow aid agencies to reach civilians in need, as well as lifting of humanitarian access restrictions in the West Bank.
- Guarantee safe passage for civilians who need and want to seek safety to any place they feel safe. Families need adequate access to information on options and to be given adequate time to do so safely.

END

Signatories:

Alliance of Lawyers for Human Rights

Better Care Network

Child Friendly Justice European Network (CFJ-EN)

Child Rights Centre

ChildFund Alliance

Children and Families Across Borders

Defence for Children International Belgium

Defence for Children International Greece

Defence for Children International Italia

Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk e.V. (German Children's Fund)

Eurochild

EuroHealthNet

European Network on Statelessness

Hope and Homes for Children

ISSA - the International Step by Step Association

Lifelong Learning Platform

Lumos

Plan International EU Office

Save the Children Europe

Social Activities and Practice Institute Bulgaria

SOS Children's Villages International

World Vision EU Representation

Young Perspectives