



20 May 2021

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Middle East crisis: protect the children

Declaration adopted by the Committee on 20 May 2021

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development is deeply shocked by the loss of human life and flagrant disrespect for humanitarian law in the latest escalation of the conflict in the Middle East, in particular with regard to children – who have fallen victim to killings, injuries, destruction of civilian infrastructure such as housing, schools and hospitals, and denial of access to humanitarian assistance. This conflict causes immeasurable human suffering and economic deprivation. It also breeds fear and hatred, distrust, despair, and incitement to violence.

The States Parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) have undertaken to respect the rules of international humanitarian law and to take all feasible measures to ensure the protection of children who are affected by an armed conflict (Article 38). These and other provisions of international law are currently being violated by both sides.¹ All children must be protected, and the bloodshed must stop now.

Disrespect for humanitarian law must be condemned without any reservations; all available channels must be used to mediate an immediate ceasefire; all children must be protected in accordance with international standards; and diplomacy must be intensified to address systemic injustices that underlie the long-lasting hostilities.

The Committee recalls that States Parties to the UN CRC also endeavour to take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of armed conflicts (Article 39). The Committee thus calls on Israel to treat any Palestinian and Israeli Arab minors arrested during the current strife in accordance with the Parliamentary Assembly's Resolution 2236 (2018) on "The treatment of Palestinian minors in the Israeli justice system", and reiterates the Assembly's willingness to assist the Knesset and the Palestinian authorities in this regard.

¹ The UN Security Council defined the six grave violations affecting children as follows: killing and maiming of children; recruitment or use of children as soldiers; sexual violence against children; abduction of children; attacks against schools or hospitals; and denial of humanitarian access for children. Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions requires that children are protected in the same way as all "persons taking no active part in the hostilities". Protocol I to the Fourth Geneva Convention provides that: "Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require" (Article 77).

Appendix I

Since 10 May 2021, at least 63 children in Gaza and 2 children in Israel have lost their lives, and more than 450 children are reported injured in Gaza. Fifty schools in Gaza have reportedly been damaged by Israeli airstrikes over the past week, impacting more than 41,000 children, and three schools in Israel have reportedly been damaged by rockets fired from Gaza.² 47,000 displaced people have been driven to use schools and other places as shelter with limited access to water, food, hygiene or health services³, after losing their homes to airstrikes⁴.

The Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2236 (2018) on “The treatment of Palestinian minors in the Israeli justice system” called on the Israeli authorities to work with UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross, civil society and all relevant stakeholders with a view to changing, as appropriate, laws, practice and attitudes so as to fully protect the rights of Palestinian children in the Israeli justice system.⁵

² <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/where-we-work/middle-east/occupied-palestinian-territory>

³ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14521.doc.htm>

⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/fifty-schools-gaza-and-three-israel-have-been-damaged-last>

⁵ <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/25144>