

CHILDREN IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

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Measurable improvements have been made over the past 15 years in enabling Palestinian children to enjoy their rights, but many of these gains are now in jeopardy.

Poverty has dramatically worsened since 2000 and available data points to declines or stagnation in children's health and education indicators over the same period. Recent levels of violence are causing unprecedented hardship for families across the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).

Access to jobs, schools, and medical care is hampered by hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks in Gaza and the West Bank, and children suffer from high exposure to chronic violence and psychosocial stress. Caregivers report acute signs of distress among children and parents say they are increasingly unable to fulfil their children's basic needs.

All children have the same rights
UNICEF is the world's leading organisation working for children and their rights. Our practical programmes help meet every child's right to be as healthy as possible, to be educated, to be treated fairly, to be listened to, and to have a childhood free from adult responsibilities.

In 1989 the world promised to uphold children's rights by adopting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). UNICEF is the only organisation working for children that is recognised in the Convention and it underpins all our work.

State signatories to the Convention are obligated to amend and create laws and policies to fully implement its standards. They are also required to report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for examination on their progress with the Convention's implementation. Although the PA endorsed the

CRC in 1995, it cannot ratify the Convention as there is currently no internationally recognised Palestinian state. Its endorsement, however, signifies a moral duty to respect and promote the CRC standards within its jurisdiction. Since endorsing the CRC, the PA has made progress towards enshrining its standards.

Israel ratified the CRC in 1991. Its first State Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2001 did not include information on Palestinian children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child holds that as the occupying power, Israel is the primary state duty bearer.

UNICEF works tirelessly with governments and communities to help them keep their promise to fulfil children's rights. We all need to recognise children's rights and take responsibility to ensure they are met. None of this work is possible without the support of our donors as, while part of the UN family, we are not funded from the UN budget.

What UNICEF is doing right now to help children in the oPt

With staff in Jerusalem, Gaza, Nablus, Jenin and Hebron, UNICEF works with the PA and a broad range of partners to protect children and women from the impact of violence, and to reach the most vulnerable children to prevent further deterioration in their conditions and well-being.

A right to the best possible health

Clean water, nutritious food and medical care are essential for every child but, for those caught up in emergencies, UNICEF and our partners need to give extra support so that these rights can be fulfilled. Households in the oPt have become significantly and rapidly poorer in recent years, and food insecurity is on the rise, affecting more than half of households in Gaza and a quarter in the West Bank. Under-five and infant mortality rates for Palestinian children improved between 1990 and 1999, but have barely changed since then. Almost 12,000 children under five years old still die from preventable causes each year, as do over 1,870 children below 12 months. Sixty-seven per cent of child deaths occur within their first six days of life.

The proportion of underweight children under five years old has dropped significantly, especially in Gaza, where the rate halved from 5.2 per cent in 1996 to 2.4 per cent in 2006. The proportion of children who are stunted, however, or short for their age, rose to 10.2 per cent in 2006. Less than a quarter of mothers in Gaza and the West Bank practice exclusive breastfeeding – a critical factor in reducing infant mortality linked to common childhood illnesses and under-nutrition. Between August and November 2009, over 40,000 mothers in hospitals and community health centres have been targeted with information and skills on proper infant and child feeding practices. In Gaza, between March and November 2009 over 4,500 home visits were conducted

to identify and care for severely malnourished children, and some 350 children have been referred to UNICEF-supported feeding centres.

Lack of safe drinking water and inadequate sanitation facilities are endangering the health of children and their families, especially in marginalised communities. Almost 250,000 people in 200 communities must cope with less than 30 litres per day each for their general water requirements, an amount far below the internationally recommended daily amount of 150 litres. At home, families are often forced to trade off household and personal hygiene so they will have enough water for cooking and drinking. In October 2009, UNICEF completed the construction of a water supply mains and distribution network in northern Gaza that expands access to water for up to 30,000 people. Six small desalination units have also been installed at water wells across Gaza that will each provide up to 5,000 residents with safe water. Two large desalination units, each with the capacity to serve up to 15,000, have also been installed.

Protecting vulnerable children

Children and their families in the oPt live in an environment characterised by violence, poverty and insecurity. Children are reported to be anxious, under-achieving at school, and showing other signs of psychological stress. A total of 1,475 Palestinian children were killed in the conflict with Israel since the beginning of the second intifada in September 2000 until January 2009, and thousands more have been injured. Since 2000, around 6,500 Palestinian children have been detained through the Israeli military justice system. Children as young as 12 are tried as adults as soon as they become 16, in contrast to Israeli law, where majority is attained at 18.

UNICEF and its partners are working to build a protective environment for all children by – amongst other

practical initiatives – supporting the establishment of a national framework for child protection that outlines laws, policies, systems and services, and resource needs, as well as promoting a culture of zero-tolerance towards abuse, exploitation and violence against children in schools and in society as a whole.

Education is vital

Every child has the right to a quality education but learning outcomes in oPt are plummeting. In 2007-2008, only one in five Gazan sixth-graders passed standardised tests, as did about half of their peers in Nablus and Jenin. To support the goal of a quality education for all children, during 2009 in Gaza some 500 teachers, 200 principals and 40 supervisors were trained on child-friendly teaching and school management, and 120 kindergarten caregivers have begun an extensive training course on early childhood care and development. In the West Bank, UNICEF-supported extra-curricular sports and recreational activities and libraries are ongoing in more than 80 government schools. Over 90,000 stationery sets, supplied by UNICEF, are being distributed to students.

Help us to protect more children

UNICEF relies on the support of donors like you to continue our life-saving work for and with children.

UNICEF urgently requires additional funds to protect the rights of vulnerable children affected by conflict or natural disasters.

Please donate now to the Children in Palestine Appeal

 **0800 316 5353**

 **www.unicef.org.uk/opt**

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Thank you