

OCHA oPt

occupied Palestinian territory

humanitarian

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FOCUS ON GAZA

Overview

The reporting period was distinguished by an alarming increase in the level of violence, in particular in the Gaza Strip. The intensity of fighting and Israeli incursions is unparalleled in Gaza City since the start of the current conflict in September 2000 with many clashes taking place in the densely populated city and refugee camps. Some 53 Palestinians were killed and more than 387 were injured between 16 February and 11 March. **Twenty-five percent of the casualties were children.**

The Israeli incursion into Jabalya refugee camp on 5 March lasted for 8 hours and was the second in two days. Three of the 11 killed were children under 15 years of age, and another 140 people were injured. Most of the deaths occurred when a tank shell was fired at a group of Palestinians attempting to put out a fire ignited in earlier fighting. Rocket and artillery attacks into heavily populated urban areas will inevitably result in collateral deaths.

Many of the victims are often children, which is cause for grave concern. In Gaza, over 70% of the population is under the age of 25 and 50% is under the age of 15. Among Palestinian children injured in the OPT in 2002, 493 children were between the ages of 0-8 years, and 584 were between the ages of 9-12 years. That is, 42 per cent of Palestinian children injured in 2002 were below the age of 12 years.

A Palestinian suicide bombing was carried out in the city of Haifa on 5 March, resulting in the deaths of 17 people, including 9 teenagers. Members of Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip carried out a number of attacks against Israeli targets, including the firing of several homemade Kassam rockets into Israeli towns in the Negev.

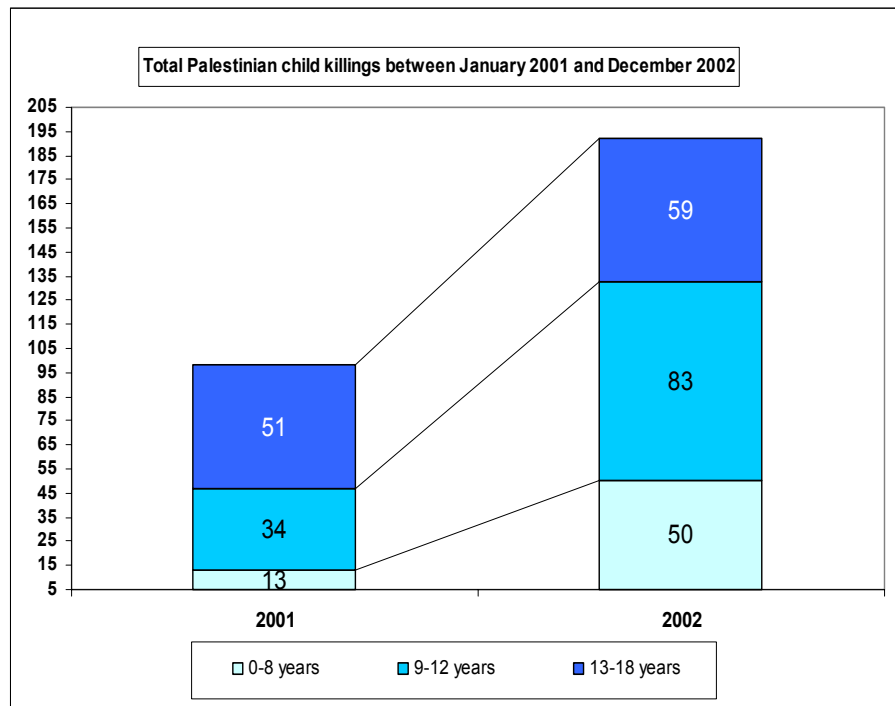
Children in Gaza

Since September 2001, the Gaza Strip has witnessed the most conflict-related Palestinian child casualties, with 84 deaths in 2002, and 64 in 2001, making it the most dangerous location in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) to raise a child.

Israeli military and settler violence towards Palestinian children has increased considerably over the last year. Total Palestinian child casualties increased by 96 per cent over the last year, from 98 in 2001 to 192 in 2002.⁺ More worrying, eighty-two of the 192 deaths in 2002 were caused by multiple injuries, compared with only 31 out of 98 in 2001. This suggests that the scale of violence to which Palestinian children are being exposed has also intensified.

In the under 12 age group, **83 Palestinian children were killed** in 2002, compared with 34 in 2001. According to Defense for Children International (DCI), most of this increase is attributable to a staggering rise in deaths among Palestinian children aged less than 8 years - **up from 13 in 2001, to 50 in 2002.**

Between 1 December 2002 and 4 March 2003, 16 Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers, either in their own homes, on the way to or from school, in school, or while at play.



One example of the IDF's indiscriminate use of force in civilian areas was when a 12-year-old girl was shot in the head while sitting at her desk in a United Nations school in Gaza. The girl was attending an Agency-run school when she was wounded by retaliatory fire from Israeli forces after Palestinian militants opened fire on an Israeli tank near the Khan Younis refugee camp.

There is widespread concern within the humanitarian community about the non-fatal injuries to Palestinian children. In 2002, DCI documented 2,524 Palestinian child injuries related to the current crisis in Israeli-Palestinian relations. The Gaza Strip witnessed the highest number of injured Palestinian children. Other areas also bare the brunt of violence with 627 children injured in Nablus (West Bank) alone.

According to UNICEF, the total number of children killed since September 2000 is 405 Palestinian children and 92 Israeli children.

⁺ Statistics provided are attributable to both UNICEF and Defense for Children International (DCI).

Major events in Gaza

The escalating violence in Gaza was reported on in the previous OCHA update covering 22 January-15 February, and continued to occur.

- In Gaza city, a major IDF incursion took place in the Shajaiyeh and Tufah neighbourhoods on **19 February**. The IDF entered the Shajaiyeh neighbourhood and continued to Tufah neighbourhood causing damage to the Dar al-Arqam school and demolishing three workshops and one house. Three people were killed when the IDF demolished the house and another 8 people were killed during the fighting. Gaza municipality reported that the main electricity supply to Gaza was cut during the operation.
- On **23-24 February**, the IDF launched a large-scale operation into Beit Hanoun town in northern Gaza. The attack came in response to the reportedly frequent firing of Kassam rockets into Israel from this area. A curfew was imposed on the area; six houses were demolished and 6 Palestinians killed and 35 injured, according to the Beit Hanoun municipality. The IDF again demolished the two access bridges in Beit Hanoun. After the operation, three Kassam rockets were launched into the Israeli town of Sderot in the Negev on **24 February** from this area.
- On **2 March**, the IDF attacked Khan Younis refugee camp and al-Nimsawi neighbourhood in the western part of the town. Two Palestinians were killed at home and 39 were injured. The IDF used explosives to demolish a 7 story apartment building located in a densely populated area, which severely damaged dozens of neighbouring houses. In addition, 5 other houses and large parts of the walls surrounding Nasser Hospital and an UNRWA preparatory school were demolished by an IDF bulldozer.
- In an IDF attack on **3 March** on El-Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip 8 Palestinians were killed and 39 injured; among those killed were a pregnant woman and her unborn child. The woman bled to death under the ruins of her destroyed house and her 10 children were among those injured. In addition, the IDF destroyed a mosque and 14 houses.
- On **5 March**, a large IDF attack took place in Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza. 11 people were killed and some 150 injured. Among the injured were four PRCS medics on duty and two journalists working for Reuters. 8 houses were reportedly demolished during the attack.
- On **7 March**, four days after seizing a chunk of Gaza's northern territory in an operation to stop Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel, the IDF pulled out of positions they had taken up outside the Jabaliya refugee camp.
- On **8 March**, IDF helicopters fired a missile at a car carrying Ibrahim al-Makadme, one of the founders of Hamas, and three companions in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood in Gaza city. A child passing by on her way to school was injured.

Humanitarian Access and Incidences in Gaza

On 19 February in the northern part of the Gaza Strip, IDF soldiers fired warning shots within meters of a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) car. The team's presence in the area had been previously coordinated and approved by the IDF.

Humanitarian access to Al-Mawasi, the Palestinian enclave in the Gush Qatif settlement bloc in the southern part of the Gaza Strip, has become increasingly difficult. MSF and WFP trucks carrying medical and food assistance tried to gain access on several occasions during the reporting period but were unable to pass the checkpoint. Furthermore, only men over 40 and women over 35 are allowed to

cross the checkpoint and then, only by foot. B'Tselem released an alarming report of the situation on Al-Mawasi in March 2003. For the full report see: http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/docs/ingo/Btselem/2003_Al_Mwassay_Eng.pdf

PRCS reported severe difficulties in accessing people in need of medical help during IDF incursions in Gaza:

- On 19 February, the IDF fired in the direction of an ambulance on its way to pick up two persons from the Al-Karam intersection in Gaza City. Since the IDF had surrounded the area, the ambulance coordinated its entry through the ICRC. The IDF permitted the ambulance passage on the condition that it drove slowly, with its lights flashing and the interior lights of the ambulance on. When the ambulance reached Salah Al-Din Street, an Israeli tank gave them the signal to go ahead and the ambulance began to proceed as agreed. However, the tank started to approach the ambulance and soldiers positioned on the tank fired in the direction of the ambulance which then was forced to turn back;
- On 23 February, during the IDF operation in Beit Hanoun, movement of PRCS ambulances was severely restricted. Despite coordination through the ICRC, ambulances were stopped, searched and delayed for hours;
- On 1 March during the attack on Khan Younis city the IDF restricted the medical services in the city's main hospital. IDF soldiers obstructed the access of medical teams and ambulances into and out of the hospital. The Israeli army destroyed several parts of the hospital's wall, shot in the direction of its emergency entrance, and wounded a nurse in the emergency department. A PRCS ambulance was also fired at while its team was responding to an emergency call;
- On 3 March, during the IDF attack on Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza strip, five ambulances and medical teams were blocked by tanks and other military vehicles between the Kfar Darom and Netzarim settlements;
- On 6 March during the IDF incursion into Jabaliya refugee camp which started around midnight, PRCS ambulances were restricted from reaching the injured until 7 am; PRCS medical teams and ambulances responding to emergency calls came under fire and four medics were injured and two ambulances damaged.

Other issues

- World Vision International (WVI) is preparing an emergency food assistance programme valued at US\$ 130,000 in the event of a full-scale Israeli incursion into the Gaza Strip. WVI aims to distribute about 2,500 food parcels to approximately 17,500 Palestinians living in the most exposed areas.
- Please refer to OCHA's web site for daily-updated road maps showing checkpoints and road barriers: <http://www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt/thememaps/Roads/>
- Please note OCHA has moved offices. It is now located in the old MAC House behind St. George's School in East Jerusalem. Tel/fax: 02- 582 9962

Graphs of curfews in the West Bank

