



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 21st Special Session on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Geneva, 23 July 2014

Statement on behalf of Defence for Children International (DCI), Terre des hommes-Lausanne, World Vision Jerusalem – West Bank – Gaza, War Child, and Kinder USA

Thank you Mr. President,

Since the beginning of Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip on July 8, Israeli forces have killed 147 Palestinian children and injured another 1,100. 105 of the children killed are 12 years old or younger. So far, more children have been killed by Israeli fire than Palestinian militants.

Palestinian children in Gaza live in constant fear in the midst of heavy bombings and lack access to safe areas or shelters. An estimated 116,000 children in Gaza urgently need direct and specialized psychosocial support.

Israel's military offensive on the Gaza Strip has been characterised by attacks directed at government and civilian infrastructure, residential neighbourhoods, and individual civilians, causing a large number of civilian casualties. So far, 85 schools have been damaged by shelling by Israeli forces. Civilian homes, schools, hospitals and places of worship are presumed to be civilian objects.

International law is clear. Civilians, including children, must never be targeted, and civilian structures and infrastructure are presumed not to be legitimate targets. A lawful or legitimate object of an attack can only be a military objective. To qualify as a military objective, (1) the object must be used for a military purpose, and (2) its total or partial destruction will result in a definite military advantage. Even then, parties to a conflict are bound by the principle of proportionality and are required to protect civilians from violence.

Furthermore, the recent violence is exacerbated by the blockade on the Gaza Strip imposed by Israel since 2007, which has led to a humanitarian crisis for the 1.7 million Palestinians that live in the Gaza Strip.

In light of this, Defence for Children International (DCI) and four other non-governmental organisations make the following recommendations to the Council:

1. Urge all the parties involved in the military offensive on the Gaza Strip to start a concrete process towards pacification;
2. Call for an immediate ceasefire that also ends the blockade of the Gaza Strip. Until such an agreement is reached, the undersigned stress that it is imperative that there is full compliance by the rules of international law.
3. Put in place safeguards in order to ensure that no child is killed or maimed, abducted, attacked in schools or hospitals, or denied humanitarian assistance. Civilians, including children, must never be targeted, and civilian structures and infrastructure are presumed not to be legitimate targets.