**Effect of Gaza conflict on children "devastating" – CRC**

13 January 2009

The following statement was issued today by the 18-member UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which is currently in session.

"The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child is deeply concerned at the devastating effects that the current military engagement in Gaza is having on children. Hundreds of children have been killed or injured, many seriously. Many others have lost their loved ones. The continuous fighting and destruction of livelihoods and basic infrastructures, severely compromise enjoyment of human rights especially in relation to health, education and family life. Children have also experienced serious difficulties in accessing humanitarian aid. The emotional and psychological effects of these events on an entire generation of children will be severe.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by 193 States, testifying to a universally recognized commitment for the respect and protection of the rights of children. But the rights enshrined in the Convention, including the right of children to life, survival and development and to be protected from all forms of violence, have been blatantly violated during this crisis. The Committee recalls that human rights law, including the Convention, applies at all times, including in situations of armed conflict.

The Committee stresses that, under article 38 of the Convention, States parties - in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts - shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict. They also undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child. The Committee emphasizes that all parties must ensure the protection of children during the conflict and abide by the relevant provisions of international law in this respect.

The Committee also underlines that in the preamble of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict -- to which Israel is a Party -- States parties condemn: "the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict and direct attacks on objects protected under international law, including places that generally have a significant presence of children, such as schools and hospitals." This affirmation is undermined by the fact that many children have lost their lives as a result of manifest disrespect for their protection and that of their schools, including some administered by the United Nations itself.

The Committee joins the calls of Security Council Resolution 1860 (adopted on 8 January 2009), the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for an immediate cessation of hostilities from both sides".