



Israel’s war on Gaza and the violation of children’s rights

Journal:	Children's Geographies
Manuscript ID	CCHG-2024-0022.R1
Manuscript Type:	Viewpoint Article
Keywords:	war, Israel, Palestine, Gaza
Classifications:	violence, child rights, children's geographies, security, UNCRC

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Israel's war on Gaza and the violation of children's rights

The current intensification of Israel's on-going war on Gaza has killed over 25,000 people in less than four months; half of them children. Nearly 60,000 people have been injured, almost all civilians, and many of them children (UNICEF¹). Many more thousands are missing beneath the rubble caused by the 25,000 tonnes of explosives that have been dropped on Gaza since October 7, equivalent to two nuclear bombs. The IPC has reported that the entire population of 2.2 million people is facing acute food insecurity and that this "is the highest share of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity that the IPC initiative has ever classified for any given area or country". One in four households are facing "catastrophic conditions" including starvation². All under-fives in Gaza, 335,000 children, are now at high risk of "severe malnutrition and preventable death".³

We write this viewpoint because it is not tenable as critical childhood studies scholars to remain silent in the face of these grave and systematic violations of children's rights due to Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian territories and especially in Gaza. The violence, destruction, starvation and dispossession that children in Gaza are suffering in the current moment is almost impossible to comprehend. It is precisely because of the vulnerability of children to trauma, physical and emotional, that children have special protections in international law. These protections are being violated on an daily basis by Israel's actions in Gaza.

Not only does the Israeli war on Gaza violate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also the following aspects of international law⁴ that relate directly to the rights of children:

- The 4th Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians during war and its additional protocols which provide for the care and protection of children including their rights to "their cultural environment, their education, and the exercise of their religion (GCIV Arts. 24, 50)" and specifies that
 - "Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The parties to the conflict must provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason (API Art. 77.1).
 - Pregnant women and newborn babies come under the category of "wounded persons" and hence benefit from the same protection provided for the wounded and sick under humanitarian law (API Art. 8).
 - In the distribution of relief supplies, priority shall be given to persons who must be accorded privileged treatment or special protection, such as children, expectant mothers, maternity cases, and nursing mothers (GCIV Arts. 38.5, 50; API Art. 70.1).
 - In besieged areas or occupied territories, the States party to the Conventions must permit the free passage of all supplies of essential foodstuffs, clothing, and tonics

¹ <https://www.unocha.org/news/gaza-children-under-attack>
² <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/alerts-archive/issue-94/en/>
³ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/statement-unicef-risk-famine-gaza-strip>
⁴ For a complete list of international law that refers specifically to the protection of children in war see the appendix to Amann, Diane Marie, International Child Law and the Settlement of Ukraine-Russia and Other Conflicts (2022). 99 International Law Studies. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4232165>

intended for children under fifteen and expectant and nursing mothers (GCIV Art. 23)."⁵

- Three of the UN's 'six grave violations' (killing and maiming; attacks on schools and hospitals; and the denial of humanitarian access).
- The destruction of schools also violates interlinked rights conferred by the UNCRC: The right to relax and play (Article 31); the right to freedom of expression (Article 13); the right to be safe from violence (Article 19) and the right to education (Article 28).

In addition to the direct impact of the military campaign against Gazans and in violation of the above protections, Israel has also denied entry into Gaza of food and medicine and has destroyed hospitals and disrupted water and electricity supply, causing death through starvation and disease. The current blockade is an intensification of Israel's restriction of food and medicine into Gaza which has been in place since 2007⁶. Education infrastructure has also been targeted: nine in every ten schools have been significantly damaged⁷ and the last university in Gaza was destroyed by the Israeli army on January 17, 2024. Most of the population has been displaced and seen their homes razed and are now living in tents or in the open air.

Many governments have condemned this war. At the UNGA on 27 October 2023 a resolution calling for "an immediate and sustained humanitarian truce and cessation of hostilities"⁸ was adopted by a vote of 121 states to 14, with 44 abstentions. Bolivia has severed diplomatic ties with Israel, Chile and Mexico have requested the ICC investigate possible war crimes committed by Israel, and several other countries have recalled their ambassadors. Spain's Prime Minister has consistently called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire. Most significantly, South Africa took a case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing Israel of genocide, citing many of the Israeli government's own pronouncements in support of their case. The ICJ ruled on January 26, 2024 that it is 'plausible' that Palestinians are at risk of genocide through Israel's actions in Gaza and that it must report to the Court within one month to explain how it is abiding by the court's decisions⁹.

Yet, many other governments have refused to call for a ceasefire or to condemn Israel. The UK has actively supported Israel with access to British bases in Cyprus. A coalition of the USA, UK, Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands have bombed Yemen in an attempt to force the Houthis to end their blockade of ships carrying Israeli cargo in the Red Sea¹⁰. Germany is supporting Israel at the ICJ and has banned the use of the word 'genocide' in relation to Israel, calling this charge 'antisemitic'. The USA continues to supply Israel with military aid of USD 14.3 billion (reference?) and has authorised the emergency sale of USD 147.5 million of military equipment to continue its genocidal war, bypassing Congress in the process.

The Israeli government is often defended with the argument that their actions are self-defence in response to the Hamas incursion into Israel on October 7. On that day Hamas took approximately 240 hostages and murdered 695 civilians including 39 children¹¹. It should not need to be said that

⁵ <https://guide-humanitarian-law.org/content/article/3/children/>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19975211>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68023080>

⁸ <https://press.un.org/en/2023/ga12548.doc.htm>

⁹ <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192>

¹⁰ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/01/11/statement-from-president-joe-biden-on-coalition-strikes-in-houthi-controlled-areas-in-yemen/>

¹¹ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231215-israel-social-security-data-reveals-true-picture-of-oct-7-deaths>

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

we are against the killing or kidnapping of civilians, but, for the record, we do not defend civilians being killed in conflicts or captured. That said, we must note that the claim that the war on Gaza began on October 8 is simply not true. In the first place, it has to be acknowledged that the establishment of the 1949 Armistice lines, in which Europe played a pivotal role, involved the catastrophe/*Nakba* of the forced expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians and the murder of 15,000 Palestinians between 1947 and May 1949 by the Zionist military forces¹². Furthermore, what has happened since October 8 is an intensification of Israel's occupation of three proto self-governing areas – East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank – that were established by the Oslo Accords in 1995. A key element of the Oslo Accords, signed by Israeli and Palestinian representatives, was the withdrawal of Israeli forces from these territories; that withdrawal never happened. Since the Oslo Accords were signed Israel has killed about 6,000 Palestinians, mostly in assaults on Gaza; the longest for 50 days in 2014. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem 203 Palestinians were killed in 2023 and an average of 1,130 were injured every month of 2023¹³. While the deaths of Israelis and internationals on 7 October has made news around the world, the deaths and suffering of Palestinians in Gaza goes largely unnoticed by much of the mainstream media, and has done for many years. Finally, it must be recognised that the indiscriminate bombing of a civilian population that has led to the deaths of over 25,000 people in the first 100 days of war is a form of collective punishment of the Palestinian people by the Israeli state.

Conclusion

Opposing the complicity of their governments in Israel's war, hundreds of thousands of people around the world have mobilised in support of Palestine ¹⁴ and over 2,400 childhood studies scholars and students have signed a statement demanding a ceasefire¹⁵. A small but significant opposition to the war has been slowly building in Israel, including an anti-war demonstration held on January 21, 2024¹⁶.

How should children's geographers respond to these events? Our view is that, at a minimum we must demand an immediate ceasefire. To stay silent in the face of the mass murder and disablement of children is to be complicit. As academics, we should not allow ourselves to be silenced by claims that it is 'complicated' or that analysis of the war, its causes and impacts require 'nuance' or that unless Israel or Palestine are the focus of our research we are not 'qualified' to speak out on an academic platform. We also have a crucial role to play in fostering spaces for analysis and critique, with and for colleagues, students and children. We must resist the ongoing attempts to prevent pro-Palestinian voices being heard in universities and schools¹⁷. While speaking out will not end this conflict, adding to the weight of global public opinion may persuade the USA to cease its unconditional support for Israel's actions and to stop funding its destructive power. In the past, it

Commented [MB1]: Is this only about the USA??? Or other governments? Also two more references below

¹²<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/15/nakba-mapping-palestinian-villages-destroyed-by-israel-in-1948>
¹³<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/12/12/know-their-names-palestinians-killed-by-israel-in-the-occupied-west-bank-2>
¹⁴<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/13/pro-palestine-demonstrations-around-the-world-as-gaza-war-nears-100-days>
¹⁵<https://mondoweiss.net/2023/10/childhood-researchers-call-for-an-end-to-the-western-backed-israeli-genocide-in-gaza/>
¹⁶<https://www.aljazeera.com/editorial/2024/1/21/reporters-notebook-covering-an-first-antiwar-protest-in-israel>
¹⁷<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/prevent-counter-terrorism-palestine-gaza-students-schools-universities/>

has been precisely the USA's fear about the crushing effect of its violence on its (self-ascribed) reputation as the benign hegemon of the international order that finally turned the tide of foreign (Vietnam) and domestic policy (civil rights movement). While the USA is not the only country who are complicit in Israel's genocidal actions, they play a decisive role. Without the USA's financial support and military aid Israel could not continue this war. As mentioned above, the USA provides more financial and military support to Israel than any other state. The USA remains a global hegemon. It exercised its right of veto to block a vote for a humanitarian ceasefire at the UN Security Council emergency meeting on December 8, 2023¹⁸. If they had not done so, there would have been a ceasefire.

We recognise that childhood studies scholars differ on what they consider possible solutions to ensuring the freedom and equality of Palestinians. However, regardless of what one thinks about the future of Palestine and Israel, it is incumbent on all childhood studies scholars to support an end to the violations of children's protection in international law including an immediate ceasefire, the restoration of schools and hospitals, and immediate provision of humanitarian aid including food, water and medicine. We urge scholars to use their academic platforms to vociferously oppose the ongoing murder, disablement and bereavement of children by Israel, not only in Gaza, but also in the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the rest of Palestine-Israel.

¹⁸ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144562>