

Addressing the Human Rights Concerns of Palestinian Civilians and Children in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict



United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

West Japan Model United Nations — Sixth Session

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Overview

Starting from the early 1900s, the Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the longest and most complicated disputes in the world. With its root causes going back to Jewish and Arabs competing to occupy the same piece of land between Jordan and Egypt, this armed conflict has evolved into multiple wars, negotiations, and political tensions still ongoing up to this day.

The humanitarian situation is especially worse in Gaza, a small Palestinian territory that borders Egypt. Since 2007 when Hamas took control over there, Israel and Egypt have maintained a blockade which restricted the freedom of 2.3 million Gaza civilians. The United Nations have repeatedly described Gaza as one of the worst places to live on earth, more specifically the UN Office for the Coordination reported serious shortages for Gaza civilians to access healthcare, clean water, electricity and education.

This long conflict faced a huge turning point on October 7th 2023, when Hamas both launched large scale rocket attacks and ground operations on Israel, resulting in the death of 1200 people and 250 individuals being taken hostage. Israel fully retaliated with their military, aiming to dismantle Hamas' military and government bodies. However, international communities such as the UN, human rights organizations have strongly raised concerns on civilian deaths caused by Israeli attacks on Gaza, particularly on destruction of schools and hospitals leading to the impediment of aid. The Gaza ministry of health announced by early 2025 more than 45000 civilians were killed and 100000 of them were wounded, most of them being children and women.

The situation regarding children is the most severe. UNICEF described Gaza as one of the worst places for children because of mass casualties, psychological trauma, lack of all healthcare, education and nutrition. UNICEF estimated by early 2025 more than a million children in Gaza have experienced violence, loss of a close member, and forced relocation from their homes.

Often overlooked by the Gaza situation, the West bank side of Palestine is also under a significant deterioration. Israeli settlements, which are mostly considered illegal in the international context, have increased with more violence against Palestinians and military operations. The UN human rights office has documented a rise in civilian casualties, arrests, and forced movement in the West Bank since the October attacks.

The international community has not been very effective in resolving this issue, mostly by the United States in the UN Security Council frequently vetoing ceasefire or access to humanitarian aid. On the other hand, the UN General Assembly has passed resolutions calling for a ceasefire, showing international concerns over the issue. International Court of Justice (ICJ), meanwhile, are proceeding the issue of genocide and violations of international humanitarian law.

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), is essential in addressing this crisis. As its name suggests, its objective is to respond to this situation. HRC has established an Independent international commission of inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory in 2021 to further investigate the human rights situation in Palestine. The question this committee should be aiming to resolve are the ways the HRC and international organizations can protect Palestinian civilians, especially children.

Definition of Important Terms

Occupation

In a legal context occupation means a situation where foreign military controls or occupies a land without that government's consent. Both the United Nations and the ICJ admitted Israel's actions in both West bank and Gaza qualifies as an occupation.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

International humanitarian law is a body governing how wars should be conducted to limit suffering. Its main principles include distinction, proportionality and precaution.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Individuals who were forced to flee from their homes to geopolitical conflicts but remained in their own borders, which differentiates them from refugees who cross the border. There are millions of IDPs within Palestine due to the situation.

Blockade

A military measure that prevents the flow of people or aid into a certain region. Egypt and Israel have been maintaining a blockade to Gaza since 2007, leading to the dire situation of Gaza civilians.

Ceasefire

An agreement between the two sides to stop military actions against each other. In this context, multiple ceasefire proposals have been suggested, but none of them were implemented.

Right of Return

A law confirmed by the UN General Assembly resolution 194, granting Palestinians or their descendants who were displaced during the 1948 Israeli war of independence the right to return to their homes and receive compensation, though being unresolved.

Timeline of Key Events

1917: The Balfour Declaration

A dual-declaration made by the British ensuring the settlement of both Arabs and Jewish in the same Palestine territories, which were their colonies in the middle east. This complication serves as a seed for almost every following conflict in the region.

1947: UN Partition Plan (Resolution 181)

A General Assembly proposal to divide British Palestinian territories into Jewish and Arab controlled states. Jewish accepted the plan and established Israel, but Arabs did not and started a war against newly independent Israel.

1948: The Nakba and the Establishment of Israel

A coalition of Arab states attacked Israel, a newly independent state who declared independence on May 14th, 1948. With Israel taking victory and gaining a stronger presence in the Middle East, this war led to 700,000 displaced Palestinians from their homes.

1967: The Six-Day War and the Start of the Occupation

In a war that lasted only for six days, Israel occupied the West bank, Gaza, Sinai peninsula and the Golan heights from neighboring Egypt and Jordan. While the Security Council passed Resolution 242 requiring Israel to withdraw from these regions, it has not been followed and therefore has not been effective.

1987–1993: The First Intifada and the Oslo Accords

After the mass uprising in Palestine against Israel in 1987, an accord was made in Oslo, Norway in 1993. While this accord established a framework for partial Palestinian self-governance, borders and refugee issues remain unsolved.

2000–2005: The Second Intifada

After the collapse of Camp David talks in 2000, another Palestinian uprising broke out. By utilizing suicide bombing tactics against Israel or Israel Defense Forces (IDF), thousands of people were killed until the violence subsided in 2005.

2007: Hamas Takes Control of Gaza and the Blockade Begins

After Hamas won the 2006 elections in Gaza and took office, Israel and Egypt, bordering states of Gaza, imposed a full blockade on Gaza. Due to the blockade it has been a challenge for civilians to receive aid.

2021: Establishment of the UN Commission of Inquiry

The UN Human Rights Council established this organization on occupied Palestine territory. Unlike previous measures, this commission was granted an open-ended mandate, meaning it can work there indefinitely.

October 2023–: The October 7 Attack and Israel's Military Campaign

The deadliest attack on Israel carried out by surprise Hamas attacks. After losing 1200 people and 250 individuals being taken hostage, Israel retaliated with a large-scale military campaign on Gaza to destroy Hamas. While UN agencies warned of famine, the ICJ issued measures for Israel to prevent actions that could violate the Geneva convention.

Position of Key Nations

-State of Palestine-

Palestine, or the state of Palestine is an observer UN state recognized by more than 140 member states. The country is divided into two regions: West Bank and Gaza. While the West Bank is ruled by Palestinian authorities who prefer legal resistance and UN appeal, Gaza is occupied by Hamas who focuses on armed resistance.

-State of Israel-

Israel, or State of Israel, maintains a military campaign in Gaza. As a retaliation to Hamas's October 7th attacks Israel's campaigns are a lawful act of self-defense. Israel argues civilian deaths in Gaza are inevitable if Hamas keeps blending their combatants with civilians in the same building such as hospitals or schools.

-United States of America-

Being one of the closest allies to Israel, the US is supporting Israel militarily, economically, and diplomatically, specifically vetoing security council resolutions that go against Israel's national interest. However in the Biden administration the US also expressed concerns about civilians in Gaza and called for humanitarian access. The US officially stated the future of Gaza should not include Hamas.

-Arab Republic of Egypt-

Egypt, or the Arab Republic of Egypt plays an important role in this conflict. As an Arab Muslim country that has one of the longest diplomatic histories with Israel among its neighbors, Egypt serves as a key mediator in this conflict. Egypt expresses serious concerns regarding the potential danger of influx of Gaza refugees into their territory, and opposes the mass displacement of Palestinians.

-Türkiye-

Turkey, or Republic of Türkiye, although being one of the earliest nations to establish diplomatic relations with Israel in 1949 in order to receive NATO membership, keeps a critical stance on Israel especially under president Erdogan. Türkiye provides significant aid to Gaza under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

-Jordan-

Jordan or Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is one of the Arab muslim countries that has the longest diplomatic history with Israel and serves as a mediator along with Egypt. Although the government and the royal family generally maintain a positive relationship with Israel, most civilians share anti-Israel sentiments. Jordan is also the country hosting the most Palestinian refugees.

Suggested Solutions

1. Strengthening International Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

One of the biggest barriers in protecting Palestinian civilians is an absence of enforceable systems monitoring the violation of international humanitarian law. UN human rights council members should focus on setting clear procedures to handle humanitarian violations to the International Criminal Court (ICC). While ICC investigations are ongoing, it has largely been ineffective and needs stronger cooperation and more effective evidence collection. Because it is difficult for stronger countries to reach a consensus regarding stability measures, it will require significant diplomatic effort to do so.

2. Ensuring Unimpeded Humanitarian Access to Gaza

UN bodies such as UNRWA, World food programme (WFP), UNICEF, and World Health Organization (WHO) have identified lack of humanitarian aid as a cause of dire civilian situations in Gaza. The Committee should push for specific actions, such as permanent humanitarian corridors, clearer inspection of aid shipments, and better protection of aid workers in conflict areas. Member states should also address funding, mainly for providing education and healthcare to refugees.

3. Prioritizing the Protection of Children

As previously mentioned, Gaza has one of the worst conditions for children to live. This committee should keep UN conventions on the Rights of the Child in mind, and implement solutions such as placing dedicated child protections officers or creating a mechanism focusing on violations being conducted on children. Particularly focusing on mental health and psychological support programs for children, new programs should provide more needs compared to existing ones that were not sufficient.

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