**Graveyard for children**

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In a speech delivered on November 6, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres declared that “Gaza is becoming a graveyard for children”. While his comments garnered immediate media attention, they somehow still understated the reality for Palestinian children.

In Gaza, Israeli forces are killing Palestinian children at a previously unfathomable rate. Over the past 40 days, Israeli forces have murdered more than 5,000 children in Gaza – with an additional 1,800 children missing under the rubble of destroyed buildings, most of them presumed dead. That is more than 6,800 Palestinian children killed over a period of 40 days. That amounts to over 170 children killed each day.

In the West Bank, Israeli forces have killed 54 Palestinian children since October 7, according to documentation collected by Defence for Children International–Palestine (DCIP). This includes 38 Palestinian children killed in October alone, the highest number of Palestinian children killed in a single month since Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank began in 1967.

As in previous Israeli military offensives on Gaza, Israeli attacks the DCIP has investigated have been overwhelmingly indiscriminate and disproportionate. The Israeli army has targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure in densely populated civilian areas with wide-area-effect explosive weapons. In other words, every bomb the Israeli army drops on Gaza potentially constitutes a war crime.

Make no mistake, Guterres was sounding the alarm because he knows that Palestinian children are living and dying in an unrivaled moment. Israeli forces killed more children in the first month of the war than state and non-state actors did in other armed conflicts over the past two years combined, according to the UN chief’s own annual reports.

Nearly 50 percent of the 2.3 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip are children. This incredibly youthful population has experienced 16 years of Israeli siege, which amounts to collective punishment. Palestinian children have faced repeated Israeli military offensives where direct, indiscriminate, and disproportionate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure and systemic impunity have been the norm.

Guterres knows the death toll is expected to rise dramatically as Israeli authorities have cut off Palestinians in Gaza from food, water, electricity, medical supplies, and fuel, catapulting a captive civilian population into what he described as a “nightmare” that “is a crisis of humanity”.

Among Gaza’s population are an estimated 50,000 pregnant people. This means there are 160 deliveries on average taking place daily.

Pregnant people struggle to access essential health services as the healthcare system has collapsed. People in the postnatal period and babies in neonatal units are at grave risk due to dangerous fuel shortages as the Israeli authorities have prohibited the entry of fuel desperately needed to operate generators to run life-saving equipment.

Survivors of Israeli bombardment face escalating food insecurity and lack of clean water, which puts pregnant women and children particularly at risk of disease, malnutrition and health complications.

British humanitarian organisation Oxfam has declared that, due to Israeli authorities’ near complete denial of humanitarian access, starvation is being used as a weapon of war against civilians in Gaza. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) has noted conditions are inhumane and continue to deteriorate as days go by for more than 717,000 internally displaced people sheltering in 149 UNRWA facilities.

Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have repeatedly rejected increasing calls and pressure for a ceasefire in Gaza. Instead, Israeli forces have intensified indiscriminate and direct attacks against residential buildings and civilian infrastructure including hospitals, schools, bakeries, and solar panels.

As Israeli officials are seemingly undeterred in their attempt to depopulate Gaza and create conditions that eliminate Palestinian life, world leaders show, day after day, that they lack the courage to force an end to the bombardment and instead are actively supporting the Israeli onslaught.

The administration of US President Joe Biden has recently approved a $320m deal with Israel for the purchase of United States precision bombs and has allowed the sale of thousands of assault rifles to Israeli authorities despite concerns that they could land in the hands of Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank. This is apart from the $14bn emergency funding for Israel requested from the US Congress.

These arms sales and funding make Washington even more complicit in the apparent mass atrocities the Israeli army is committing in Gaza.

For decades, the international community has supported and justified Israeli war crimes and the denial of the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination, prioritising the security of the Israeli people at the expense of Palestinian life. Palestinian children are bearing the brunt of that complicity and the failure of international law, protection, and accountability mechanisms.

It is paralysing to think that around 9 to 10 classrooms of students are being obliterated from the Earth each and every day by the Israeli army’s intensive bombardment of residential buildings and civilian infrastructure in Gaza.

Excerpted: ‘Israel’s slaughter of Palestinian children must end’. Courtesy: Aljazeera.com