**War on children**

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Israel kills Palestinian children as a matter of policy. This claim can easily be demonstrated and is supported by the latest findings of a Human Rights Watch report.

The question is: why?

When the police or military shoot a child anywhere in the world, though utterly tragic, it can be argued, at least in theory, that the killing was an unfortunate mistake.

But when thousands of children are killed and wounded in a systematic, ‘routine’ and comparable method within a relatively short period of time, the killing of children must be deliberate.

In a recent report, entitled ‘West Bank: Spike in Israeli Killings of Palestinian Children’, HRW reaches a strong conclusion based on an exhaustive examination of medical data, eyewitness accounts, video footage, and field research - the latter pertaining to four specific cases.

One is that of Mahmoud al-Sadi, a 17-year-old Palestinian boy from the Jenin Refugee Camp. He was killed last November, 320 meters away from any clashes in the camp between invading Israeli forces and Jenin fighters.

Mahmoud was on his way to school and carried nothing that could be seen, from the soldiers’ point of view, as threatening or suspicious.

The story of the Jenin boy is typical and is often repeated throughout the West Bank, sometimes daily. The predictable outcome, as HRW puts it, is that these killings are followed with “virtually no recourse for accountability”.

As of August 22, 34 Palestinian children in the West Bank were killed, adding yet more tragic numbers to a foreboding year that promises to be the most violent yet, since 2005.

This year “already surpasses 2022 annual figures, and the highest figure since 2005,” in terms of casualties, reported Tor Wennesland, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East, during a UN briefing on August 21.

These numbers, among other factors - including the expansion of illegal Israeli Jewish settlements in the West Bank - “threatens to worsen the plight of the most vulnerable Palestinians”, according to Wennesland.

Those “most vulnerable Palestinians” however, exist beyond the realm of numbers. When Israeli soldiers killed 2-year-old toddler, Mohammed Tamimi on June 5, the little boy’s name was added to an ever-expanding list of numbers.

The memory of the infant, however, like the memory of all other Palestinian children, is etched into the collective consciousness of all Palestinians. It deepens their pain, but also compels their struggle and their resistance.

For Palestinians, the killing of their children is not a random act of a military that lacks discipline and fears no repercussions. Palestinians know that the Israeli war on children is an intrinsic component of the larger Israeli war on all Palestinians.

Israel does not officially declare that it is purposely targeting Palestinian children. That would be a public relations disaster. Some Israeli officials in the past, however, did let their guard down, offering a strange and troubling logic.

Palestinian children are “little snakes’’, Israeli politician Ayelet Shaked wrote in 2015. In a Facebook post, published in the Washington Post, Shaked declared war on all Palestinians, and called for the killing of “the mothers of the (Palestinian) martyrs.”

“They should follow their sons,” she wrote, “nothing could be more just.” Shortly after, Shaked ironically became Israel’s Justice Minister.

But not all Israeli officials are candid about the killing of Palestinian children, and potentially their mothers. Data collected by international rights groups, however, leaves no doubt that the nature of the killings is part of a comprehensive strategy deployed by the Israeli military.

“In all cases,” recently investigated by HRW, “Israeli forces shot the children’s upper bodies.” This was done without the “issuing of warnings or using common, less lethal measures.”

Specifically, the killing of Palestinian children is a centralized and deliberate Israeli military strategy.

The same logic, now applied to the West Bank, has already been used in the besieged Gaza Strip. UN figures showed that, in the Israeli war on Gaza in 2008-9, 333 Palestinian children were killed - other estimates put the number at 410; in 2012, 47 children; in 2014, 578; in 2021, 66; in 2022, 17, and so on.

Between 2018 and 2020, 59 Palestinian children were killed in what was known as the “March of Return”, mass protests that took place at the fence separating Israel from besieged Gaza. All the children were killed from a distance by Israeli snipers.

When the numbers of dead and wounded children are tallied, they are counted in the thousands - precisely, 8,700 Palestinian child casualties between 2015 and 2022, according to the UN.

Even the callous and often dehumanizing logic of ‘collateral damage’ cannot justify such figures. Though the war on Palestinian children is intentional, protracted and ongoing, not a single Israeli military or government official was ever held accountable in an international court.

Even the UN ‘List of Shame for Killing Children’ never branded Israel, though other countries have been ‘shamed’ for far fewer crimes against children.

As the killing of children is perceived - according to the twisted logic of the likes of Shaked - to be functional for Israel and, amid the absence of any accountability, Israel finds no reason or urgency to end its war on Palestinian children.

With the constant loosening of the rules of military engagement in Israel, and the terrifyingly genocidal language used by Israel’s far-right ministers and their massive constituency, more Palestinian children are likely to lose their lives in the near future.

Yet, the most that UN officials and rights groups seem to be able to do now is to tally the alarming casualty figures. Alas, no number is large enough to dissuade Israel from killing Palestinians.

The problem for Palestinians is not just that of Israel’s violence, but also the lack of international will to hold Israel accountable.

Accountability requires unity, decisiveness of will and action. This task should be a priority for all countries that genuinely care about Palestinians and about universal human rights.

Excerpted: ‘Israel’s War on Children’. Courtesy: Commondreams.org