

Terror-linked and anti-Israel NGOs Exploit Children in Campaign to Blacklist the IDF

June 04, 2023

The UN Secretary-General publishes a yearly report on “Children and Armed Conflict,” (CAAC) which surveys instances of alleged “grave violations” of children’s rights around the world. (The six “grave violations” are killing or maiming of children; recruitment or use of children by armed forces or armed groups; attacks on schools or hospitals; rape or other sexual violence against children; abduction of children; denial of humanitarian access.) The CAAC report includes an annex listing “parties to armed conflict” (i.e. armed groups) that perpetrate these “grave violations.” Listed parties are then placed under a UN sanctions framework known as a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism.

As documented by NGO Monitor in several publications, Israel is the target of an on-going multi-year campaign, led by terror-linked and pro-BDS NGOs, that exploit children in advocating for the IDF’s inclusion on this blacklist. Many of these NGOs are funded by European governments.

The annex is designed to generate **“targeted measures against violators, including the possibility of sanctions”** (emphasis added). To date, the annex almost entirely consists of failed states, state-sponsored militias, and terrorist organizations such as ISIS, Boko Haram, the Taliban, and Al-Qaeda.

The Secretary-General’s report published in June 2023 – discussed below – suffers from the same faulty methodology and unreliable sources of data that have plagued previous editions.

Reliance on Terror-linked and Pro-BDS NGOs

The Secretary-General’s report presents allegations of Israeli wrongdoing as fact, asserting “verification” by UN agencies. However, NGO Monitor research shows that such allegations primarily originate from an NGO [“working group”](#) that has been campaigning to have the IDF added to the annex and are not verified.

This “working group” includes Defense for Children International-Palestine (DCI-P), designated as a terrorist entity by Israel in October 2021 over its ties to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) terrorist organization. It also includes other PFLP-linked

groups – Al-Mezan and Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) – and NGOs such as B’Tselem that use the “apartheid” libel and lobby governments and international institutions to sanction Israel.¹

Highlighting the lack of suitability of the UN partners, on May 13, 2023, following the May 2023 conflict between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) during which the Gaza-based terrorist organization [launched over 1,200 rockets](#) at Israeli towns and cities, [PCHR issued a statement](#) in which it “affirms the right of the Palestinian people to resist the occupation by all available means, including armed struggle.” (See NGO Monitor’s “[PCHR Board Members Call for Violence Against Israelis](#),” for additional details and similar examples.)

Notably, information regarding Gazan casualties is often sourced to the Hamas-run local Ministry of Health. In other words, in addition to terror-linked NGOs, the CAAC report relies heavily on unverifiable Hamas-generated material.

NGOs Declare the Objective of Blacklisting the IDF

- In May 2022, a group of highly politicized NGOs including Human Rights Watch (HRW), World Vision, Amnesty International, Defense for Children International, Save the Children, War Child, and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), [addressed a letter to the UN Secretary-General](#) ahead of the publication of the 2022 CAAC report. The NGOs wrote, “We reiterate our call to ensure that all parties to conflict responsible for committing a pattern of grave violations against children are listed in the annexes...Of similar concern, Israeli government forces have never been listed in the annexes.”
- In a [November 2019 interview, DCI-P official Eyad Abu-Eqtaish](#) explained that “his organization seeks to put the occupation on the ‘list of shame’ which the UN publishes annually via the reports it submits to international organizations.”
- In a [May 2015 webinar, Save the Children’s Monitoring and Evaluation Manager Hazem Salama](#) stated, “We are trying to get the IDF listed...we started a national and international advocacy initiative as a part of the Working Group... We were really pushing through the UN agencies and other channels.”

¹ The UN has not published the names of the organizations comprising the “working group” since 2018, highlighting a lack of transparency and accountability. However, the groups identified here as “working group” members have been identified as such previously by UNICEF and continue to produce reports and campaign on issues related to CAAC. For more information, see NGO Monitor’s, “[UNICEF and its NGO Working Group: Failing Children](#).”

NGOs Erase Palestinian Violations of Children’s Rights and Terror Involvement by Palestinian Teens

Since January 2018, NGO Monitor has identified [approximately 90 Palestinian minors killed](#) while engaging in violence against Israelis, including shootings, stabbings, lobbing explosives, Molotov cocktails, and stones, and other violent acts. These include at least 39 teens affiliated with designated terrorist organizations, including Hamas, PIJ, Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, Lions Den, PFLP, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and other factions.

This represents the “grave violation” of recruitment and use of children. According to the 2023 report, the UN only verified one such instance of recruitment and use by Palestinian terror organizations in 2022, reflecting the inability, or unwillingness, of the agencies involved to conduct effective research.

This widespread phenomenon of Palestinian teens engaging in violence against Israeli civilians and personnel is essential context for understanding Israeli responses, including the use of lethal force and detention of minors. That CAAC reporting consistently ignores these issues reflects a reliance on terror-linked and anti-Israel NGOs, which deliberately seek to minimize and whitewash the extent to which Palestinian teens are recruited by terrorist organizations and engage in violence.

Inconsistencies with CAAC Reporting and Classification Standards and Categories that Exist Only for Israel

In recent years, corresponding to the NGO-UN campaign to blacklist the IDF, NGO publications and Secretary-General CAAC reports have used criteria that are unique to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and not applied by the UN to anywhere else in the world. The double standards should be seen in the context of a concerted campaign, by the NGOs, UN officials and agencies that directly contribute data to the CAAC reporting mechanism, to blacklist the IDF.

Categorizing Tear gas as “Maiming” Solely in the Case of Israel

[According to the UN](#), the grave violation of “maiming” constitutes “Any action that causes a serious, permanent, disabling injury, scarring or mutilation to a child.”

In contrast, the June 2023 CAAC report asserts that approximately 18% of all alleged “grave violations” were due to tear gas. [According to the US Center for Disease Control](#) (CDC), the effects of tear gas are “usually short-lived (15–30 minutes) after the person has been removed from the source and decontaminated (cleaned off)” – in sharp contrast to the “permanent” and “disabling” standards ostensibly applied by CAAC. This is the only mention of tear gas in the entire document, as it is not applied to any other conflict. (This singling out of Israel appeared in the 2019-2020 report as well.)

Bizarrely, though the June 2023 CAAC report counts “tear gas injuries” as a grave violation, it lists them separately from maiming. If the Secretary-General accepts that tear gas is not a form of maiming – which should be obvious – it is unclear under what justification it appears in the report at all.

Detention of Minors

The June 2023 report claims that the UN “verified the detention of 852 Palestinian children for alleged security offences by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, including 527 in East Jerusalem.” However, youth detention – a [major theme of DCI-P \(see above\) advocacy](#) – is not considered a grave violation.

Even if it were – the UN data is skewed by conflating West Bank and East Jerusalem incidents. Under Israeli law, all Jerusalem residents are subject to civilian procedures – arrested by civilian police force and tried in domestic courts. As such, 62% of detained minors are irrelevant for a discussion of “Children and Armed Conflict.” In addition, this statistic does not reference the percentage of detainees that were involved in or suspected of involvement in terror attacks.

Additionally, since at least 2019, each annual State Department human rights report has recorded a decrease in the number of Palestinian minors detained by Israel, relative to the previous year:

- The [2019 State Department human rights report](#) states, “the monthly average number of minors in detention during the year was down from 2018 and at the **lowest since 2014**” (emphasis added).
- [The 2020 report on the West Bank and Gaza](#) adds, “According to Israel Prison Service (IPS) figures obtained by MCW [Military Court Watch], as of September the monthly average number of Palestinian minors in Israeli detention during the year was down from 2019 and at the **lowest since MCW began keeping records in 2008**” (emphasis added).
- [According to the 2021 report](#), “According to IPS figures obtained by the MCW, as of September the average number of Palestinian minors in Israeli detention during the

year was down 11 percent from 2020. The monthly average of 147 was the lowest since the MCW began keeping records in 2008” (emphasis added).

- As documented in the [State Department 2022 report](#), “Data published quarterly by the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) indicate that as of September 30, Israel was detaining 129 Palestinian children ages 12 to 17 in detention facilities for security-related offenses, a **decrease of 12 percent compared with 2021**” (emphasis added).

While not a grave violation, the increase in arrests in 2022 is clearly tied to an increase in Palestinian terrorism. In 2022, 25 Israelis and foreign nationals were killed in terrorist attacks, compared to 4 killed in 2021 (excluding those killed by Palestinian-launched rockets from Gaza during the May 2021 conflict.)

Attacks on Schools – Manipulated Definition Solely Applicable to Israel

In recent years, UNICEF’s NGO “working group” members have invented new, looser standards to allege Israeli violations towards Palestinian students and schools.

The [UN’s Guidance Note for attacks on schools](#) requires that an incident must bear a “clear link” to education to be considered an attack on a school.²

In an April 2020 publication on education in the West Bank, Save the Children – listed as a member of UNICEF’s “working group” – ignores the UN standard and applies a [looser “definition”](#) with [less need to prove](#) that a specific person or site was targeted due to its relationship to education.

Denial of Humanitarian Access – Manipulated Data to Increase Alleged Israeli Violations

The 2023 CAAC report claims, “The denial of humanitarian access by Israeli forces (1,863) was verified in Gaza (1,861) and in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (2). A total of 1,861 permit applications (1,070 for boys, 791 for girls) to Israeli authorities for children to exit through the Erez crossing to gain access to specialized medical treatment outside Gaza were denied or not approved in time to reach the children’s scheduled hospital appointments, while 4,106 applications were approved.”

² The Guidance Note explains that a teacher targeted on his/her way to school would be a “listing violation,” but “where it is not possible to determine the link between the attack and the targeted person’s role as a provider of education or health care, the incident should not be included as an attack on related protected person.” Threats against schools must be specifically “directed toward a particular individual or group of persons related to the seeking or provision of education or health care.”

This represents an approximately 70% approval rate, up from 62% in 2021.

Scant details or references are provided to verify such claims. Regardless, contrary to the UN’s premise, Israel is not obligated to allow residents of Gaza into Israel for medical treatment, much as it has no obligation to allow access within its borders to any other group of non-Israelis living outside of the country. Unlike the other five grave violations, denial of humanitarian access, even if it had occurred in this context, is not a listing violation that triggers inclusion in the annex.

Data on alleged Perpetration of Attacks by Israeli civilians

Like previous CAAC reports, the 2023 edition includes information about incidents allegedly involving Israeli civilians in the West Bank, without IDF involvement. Such incidents are not under the purview of the CAAC and should not be considered as part of the discussion of listing the IDF.

Severity of “violations” relative to other conflicts

According to the 2023 CAAC report, “The highest numbers of grave violations were verified in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel and the State of Palestine, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Yemen.”

Of these, the most objectively severe grave violations of killing, recruitment and use, and sexual violence represented a miniscule percentage of the grave violations reported in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As described above, violations such as maiming, attacks on schools, and denial of humanitarian access have been manipulated by biased and politicized actors to inflate the supposed wrongdoing of the IDF.

Country	Killing	Recruitment and Use	Sexual Violence	Percentage of Grave Violations
Israel and OPT	55 ³	4	0	1.88%
Yemen	158	105	3	16.66%
Afghanistan	253	54	13	17.8%

³ Includes 11 killed by “Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s Al-Quds Brigade,” and by “other Palestinian perpetrators.”

Ukraine	477	92 ⁴	3	24.5%
Somalia	166	1094	221	53.21%
Democratic Republic of the Congo	409	1545	284	66.27%
Syria	307	1696	3	82.28%

Government Funding for the NGO Campaign

Several foreign governments support the CAAC-related NGO activities. This includes funding explicitly for CAAC-related projects, as well as support for UNICEF, NGO members of its “working group,” and others campaigning on this issue:

- [Canada provided \\$546,540 to UNICEF](#), and [Switzerland provided \\$774,336](#), for a [2022 project](#) that, *inter alia*, “aims to document Children affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC) incidents within the oPt/Israel” and “Support monitoring, data analysis, and reporting on grave violations trends related to child protection concerns in Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territory (the WB) to provide evidence and inform advocacy.”

According to the project description, “Civil Society Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations (both Israeli and Palestinian) will deliver services under UNICEF supervision.”

- Germany ([\\$1,100,110](#)) and Norway ([\\$228,801](#)) funded a [2021-2022 Save the Children project](#) in the West Bank and Gaza. According to the project description, “As per the MOE [Palestinian Ministry of Education] request, there will also be a strengthening of the MRM/CAAAC [sic] documentation in the schools.”
- [Switzerland \(\\$829,646\)](#) and [Japan \(\\$1,039,889\)](#) funded a [2021 UNICEF project](#) intended to, *inter alia*, document “protection incidents in Israel and the State of Palestine.”
- Norway is providing [\\$2,521,583](#) to Save the Children for a [2019-2023 project](#) with DCI-P, other Palestinian NGOs, and the PA. The project is to “Focus on the

⁴ According to the CAAC report, “A total of 92 children were used by Russian armed forces (91) and Ukrainian armed forces 7 (1) as human shields (90), as a hostage and for domestic chores (1) and for intelligence-gathering (1).”

monitoring of child rights including improving state capacity to monitor and report to the UN Committee [sic] on the Rights of the Child; strengthening of national systems and building awareness and capacity of civil society to promote and defend child rights.”

- The [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\) Humanitarian Fund provided \\$635,000 to War Child Holland](#) for a [2021 project](#) with DCI-P and other Palestinian NGOs. According to the project description, the project will:
 - o "Address[] IHL [international humanitarian law] and IHRL [international human rights law] violations through advocacy initiatives targeting all duty bearers and based on documentation of grave violations.”
 - o "DCIP will also closely monitor, document, and rapidly report grave violations against children, for greater accountability on IHL and IHRL by duty bearers.”
 - o "DCIP field workers will closely monitor, document, and rapidly report grave violations against children, including child killings and injuries; settler violence; and recruitment.”
 - o “Evidence generation and advocacy on the impact of violations on children including grave violations.”

Related NGO Monitor publications and resources

- [Excuse and Disregard: Palestinian NGOs on Teens’ Involvement in Terror Attacks and Violent Clashes](#)
- [UN Adopts Invented NGO Claims on Palestinian Minors to Threaten Israel with Blacklist](#) (July 14, 2022)
- [UN Report on “Children and Armed Conflict”: Moving the Goalposts on Israel](#) (June 27, 2021)
- [Europe Funds Fraudulent Child Rights Campaign to Sanction Israel](#) (February 18, 2021)
- [Evaluation of the “Promoting Human Rights for Palestinian Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act”](#) (May 2, 2019)
- [UNICEF and its NGO Working Group: Failing Children](#) (January 7, 2018)