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In Gaza, Children Are Pawns of War

More Dead Kids Than Hamas Fighters

by CESAR CHELALA

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In one of its latest attacks, the Israel Defense Forces killed ten people in a Gaza park, nine of them children. As the number of Palestinian dead soars over one thousand, most of them civilians -of which at least a quarter are children- one wonders how this kind of behavior can continue without a serious response from the US. That huge numbers of children should die in these attacks is a serious indictment of the Israeli military's behavior, which has been condemned around the world.

The Israeli Broadcasting Authority has banned a radio advertisement by B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization, which listed the names of some of the children killed since the start of the conflict. B'Tselem's appeal against this decision was rejected. In its appeal, B'Tselem wanted to know the reasons for the rejection and said, "Is it controversial that the children aren't alive? That they're children? That those are their names? These are facts that we wish to bring to the public's knowledge."

While the Israeli media refuses to cover the extent of children's deaths, more than 800 people have already been killed in Gaza, of which more than 160 of are children. "The shocking number of children being killed, injured, or displaced in Gaza demands an unequivocal international response to stop the bloodshed. Entire families are being wiped out in seconds as a result of targeting of homes," stated Save the Children, an independent charity for children in need.

In the meantime, hospitals are overwhelmed as the Israeli offensive in Gaza continues unabated, and emergency room medical supplies are running out fast. There has also been a significant increase in premature births, reaching levels double the average daily rate. "We have witnessed many premature births as a result of the fear and psychological disorders caused by the [IDF] offensive," said Dr. Yousif al Swaiti, director of al-Awda hospital, the largest and the most important facility for Union of Health Work Committees.

Pernille Ironside, a UNICEF officer in Gaza, stated on PBS, "We're now over 1,100 children who have been seriously injured, maimed and even terribly burned. The physical and psychological toll that this is having on people is –it's truly- it's almost indescribable...The fact of the matter is that there is no safe place here."

The UN Human Rights Council has voted to create an independent commission to investigate potential war crimes by Israel and Hamas. According to the Palestinian human rights group Mezan, 477 civilian houses have been destroyed since the beginning of the conflict, and 332 people have died in their homes. The attacks on Palestinian homes and hospitals raise a "strong possibility that international law has been violated," said U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay.

On July 24, 15 people were killed by an IDF airstrike at a United Nations school converted to house displaced families. Robert Turner, director of operations in Gaza for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) said that no warning was given by the IDF before the missile strike.

Aahed Bakr, a fisherman whose four sons were killed by a rocket strike while playing hide and seek on the beach said, "We can't understand what's happening around us. Every day there is a new massacre. It's really something my brain can't take anymore." Lieutenant Colonel Peter Lerner, an Israeli military spokesman, said that the IDF should have been able to tell that four boys it killed on a Gaza beach last week were not Hamas operatives.

The IDF assault on Gaza has killed more children than Hamas fighters, according to children's rights groups like Defence for Children International and World Vision. The IDF's latest

operation in Gaza is called “Operation Protective Edge.” Given the number of children killed so far a more appropriate name would be “Operation Targeting Children.”