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Israeli Killings of Children in West Bank Skyrocket

UNICEF says 143 children are among the more than 500 Palestinians killed in Israeli raids and settler attacks in the occupied West Bank over the last 10 months.



A Palestinian boy and Israeli soldier in front of the Israeli West Bank Barrier. August, 2004. (Justin McIntosh, Wikipedia, CC BY 2.0)

Three days after the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion stating that Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is unlawful, the United Nations children's rights agency said that after decades of being "exposed to horrific violence," the number of children who have been killed in the West Bank since last October has skyrocketed.

Since Israel began its bombardment of the Palestinian territories nearly 10 months ago — with Gaza the primary target of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) attacks, but with West Bank communities also subjected to raids and other violence — 143 Palestinian children have been killed in the West Bank, according to the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The number represents a 250 percent increase compared to the nine months preceding the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel, after which the IDF began retaliating in the occupied territories.

“The situation has deteriorated significantly, coinciding with the escalation of hostilities inside Gaza,” said Catherine Russell, executive director of UNICEF. “We are seeing frequent allegations of Palestinian children being detained on their way home from school, or shot while walking on the streets. The violence needs to stop now.”

More than half of the killings have been reported in the cities of Nablus, Tulkarm and Jenin, the latter of which was the site of a major raid by Israeli forces earlier this month, in which 12 Palestinians were killed.



Graves in photo taken in March 2018 of two Palestinian children, shot by Israeli forces in graveyard in Artas, south of Bethlehem. (Shark1989z, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0)

All three cities have seen a rise in “militarized law enforcement operations” over the last two years, said UNICEF, as Israeli soldiers and settlers have stormed parts of the territory “to scare Palestinians out of their homes,” as the International Crisis Group reported last year.

Some of the killings of children in the West Bank over the last 10 months have received international attention, like the Israeli forces’ shooting of two children, Basil Suleiman Abu al-Wafa and Adam Samer al-Ghoul, during a raid on the Jenin refugee camp in November.

Al-Ghoul, who was 8, was shown on CCTV footage trying to run away from Israeli soldiers when he was gunned down.

“Children’s right to life must be upheld and children should never be the target of violence, no matter who or where they are,” said UNICEF in a statement, noting that more than 440

Palestinian children have also been injured by live ammunition in the West Bank since last October.

The agency said that as the death toll has risen in the West Bank, children have reported being afraid to walk through their own neighborhoods or attend school.

The children killed there since October are among more than 500 Palestinians killed in IDF raids and settler attacks over the last 10 months — more than three times the number killed there in 2022.

Since October, two Israeli children have been killed in fighting the West Bank, said UNICEF. “The true cost of the violence in the state of Palestine and Israel will be measured in children’s lives — those lost and those forever changed by it,” said Russell. “What the children desperately need is an end to violence and a lasting political solution to the crisis, so that they can reach their fullest potential in peace and safety.”

Julia Conley is a staff writer for Common Dreams.

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