

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

*Palestinian schools and universities were targeted with airstrikes, attacked by Israeli settlers and in some cases used by Israeli armed forces as interrogation centres or surveillance posts. Israeli schools were hit by indiscriminate rocket fire.*⁹¹³

CONTEXT

Hundreds of incidents of attacks on education – including killing and injury of students and teachers, and damage to schools during fighting – were documented in Israel/Palestine in 2009-2012 by the UN. The great majority of incidents occurred in connection with the Israeli military operations ‘Cast Lead’ (27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009) and ‘Pillar of Defence’ (14 November 2012 to 21 November 2012) in Gaza, and with Israeli administrative and military arrangements in Area C of the West Bank.

Palestine is comprised of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip, with Israel located between the two. Control of the land and education systems is divided between different authorities. The Israeli Ministry of Education is responsible for education in Israel, and the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Hamas-run education ministry in the Gaza Strip, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and private providers run schools in the West Bank and Gaza.

Attacks on education in the West Bank are largely linked to territorial, administrative and security arrangements. Following the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement (commonly known as the Oslo Accords), it was divided into Areas A (Palestinian National Authority (PNA) military and civil control), B (PNA civil/Israeli military control) and C (Israeli civil

and military control, comprising more than 60 per cent of the West Bank).⁹¹⁴ Sources of tension and violence include the expansion of Israeli settlements that dot Area C, restrictions on Palestinian construction and movement imposed by the Israeli military, violence and intimidation by the Israeli military and the violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers and Palestinian militants and protesters.⁹¹⁵

In particular, education is adversely affected by restrictions on movement, curfews, denial of building permits and the issuing of demolition orders against schools, settler attacks on schools and universities, and actions of Israeli military forces.⁹¹⁶

In Gaza and southern Israel, education suffers primarily from active armed conflict between Israel and the Hamas government, which violently ousted the PNA from Gaza in 2007, and other Palestinian factions.⁹¹⁷ An ongoing back-and-forth pattern of Palestinian rocket launches and Israeli artillery fire and airstrikes has damaged schools primarily in Gaza but also in Israel.

UNOCHA reported in July 2013 that 13 schools located within the Access Restricted Areas in Gaza, established in 2000, had been damaged or had classes disrupted by the enforcement of restrictions on access in the area extending up to 1.5 kilometres from the border with Israel. According to UNESCO, schools in the restricted area have also been damaged by the activity of Palestinian armed groups, some of whose rockets have fallen short and hit schools in Gaza during the reporting period.⁹¹⁸

Israel’s closures of border crossings, limits on sea access, and restrictions on access to land areas limited the entrance of building materials and prevented travel of Gazan students and education staff.⁹¹⁹ Moreover, Egyptian authorities imposed tight restrictions on Palestinian students and education staff crossing the border at Rafah, in

southern Gaza. Gazan authorities also limited students' travel outside the area.⁹²⁰

Conflict has also caused physical harm and psychosocial distress to students and education staff. In Gaza, during Operation Cast Lead, 265 students and teachers were killed and 875 injured;⁹²¹ during Operation Pillar of Defence, 21 students and school staff and teachers were killed and 343 injured. In both cases, it is not known how many casualties resulted from targeted attacks.⁹²² In southern Israel, students and staff face the constant fear of intermittent attacks on civilian areas by unguided rockets and mortars launched by Palestinians from Gaza, which have hit schools and school transport, killing one student and injuring another, and injuring a bus driver, during 2009-2012.⁹²³

The first Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in three years restarted on 29 July 2013.

Net primary school enrolment in Israel was 97 per cent and net secondary school enrolment was 98 per cent (2010), while in Palestine, these figures were 87 per cent and 81 per cent (2011) respectively.⁹²⁴ At tertiary level, gross enrolment was 62 per cent (2009) in Israel and 51 per cent (2011) in Palestine.⁹²⁵

In both the West Bank and Gaza, educational achievement has dropped in recent years, with examinations showing a decline in overall results.⁹²⁶ In Israel, rocket attacks have caused thousands of students to miss out on learning periodically.⁹²⁷

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

Both Israeli armed forces and settlers in the West Bank and Israeli armed forces and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza and southern Israel allegedly

perpetrated attacks on schools and other education facilities.

During Operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009, at least 280 out of 641 schools in Gaza were reportedly damaged and another 18 destroyed.⁹²⁸ It is not specified how many were damaged in targeted attacks; many were damaged during firing at Palestinian military positions and training sites. Incidents during the reporting period included the total destruction by aerial bombardment on 3 January 2009 of the American School in Beit Lahia, in the north of the Gaza Strip, which Israel claimed Palestinian armed groups were using as a firing position (this was disputed by local residents and the school's director);⁹²⁹ and damage to the Beit Lahia Elementary School, an UNRWA school, as a result of Israeli forces' shelling with white phosphorous, killing two boys and injuring 13 others who were using the school as an emergency shelter.⁹³⁰ The impact of the destruction of schools was subsequently compounded by an ongoing blockade imposed by Israel⁹³¹ that restricted access to building materials and other education supplies required to repair the damage, resulting in substandard school facilities, overcrowded classrooms and the under-resourcing of educational activities.⁹³²

In 2009 and 2010, the UN reported instances of Israeli forces being in schools following raids, forced entry, and search and arrest operations. In some cases, tear gas was used on students. The incidents resulted in damage to schools, interruption of education and placed students' safety at risk. A number of incidents involving the vandalizing of school buildings in the West Bank by Israeli settlers were documented in UN and media reports. On 21 October 2010, for example, vandals alleged to be settlers set fire to a storage room in a West Bank Palestinian girls' school and left graffiti on its walls.⁹³³

An Islamist Palestinian armed group claimed responsibility for setting fire to an UNRWA summer school for Palestinian children in Beit Lahia in May 2010; and an unidentified group of 25 armed militants set fire to a similar summer school in Central Gaza in June 2010.⁹³⁴ One Palestinian rocket landed near an Israeli kindergarten in 2010.⁹³⁵

In 2011, according to the UN, there were 46 incidents of violence related to education.⁹³⁶ In six instances, settler violence targeted schools in the West Bank; these cases involved settlers throwing objects such as rocks and bottles at schools, physically assaulting children and teachers inside schools, and vandalizing schools with graffiti and arson.⁹³⁷ In one case, Israeli settlers set fire to a prayer room at a school in the Nablus governorate.⁹³⁸

In 11 incidents during 2011, Israel Defence Forces (IDF) fire in Gaza, targeting military installations or training sites, damaged schools.⁹³⁹ Among these was an UNRWA school, reportedly damaged by Israeli airstrikes in December 2011.⁹⁴⁰ Two schools were damaged in 2011 by Palestinian rockets aimed at Israel, but which landed in Gaza.⁹⁴¹ In one instance, unknown masked and armed men attacked and vandalized an UNRWA summer games facility.⁹⁴²

In 2011, there were 11 instances of IDF personnel entering schools in the West Bank – with no reasons given or known. In some of these instances, schools were affected as a result of clashes occurring close to them and tear gas canisters landing inside school grounds.⁹⁴³ According to a UN respondent, in some instances the IDF entered schools to ‘intimidate’ staff and pupils against stone throwing.⁹⁴⁴

Also in 2011, there were four instances of indiscriminate rockets launched from Gaza resulting in damage to schools in southern Israel. In one

specific instance, an anti-tank missile from Gaza hit a school bus and killed a 16-year-old Israeli boy. It is not possible to ascertain if any of these attacks was targeted.⁹⁴⁵

In November 2012, the Israeli military operation Pillar of Defence, in which Israeli forces targeted military installations and training sites, resulted in the damage of more than 290 school buildings in Gaza,⁹⁴⁶ including 60 UNRWA school buildings.⁹⁴⁷ Rockets launched by Palestinian armed groups during the hostilities damaged six school buildings in seven incidents in southern Israel.⁹⁴⁸ Schools in both Gaza and southern Israel within a 40-kilometre radius of the border with Gaza were closed as fighting intensified.⁹⁴⁹

The UN documented 27 additional incidents of violence related to education in the West Bank in 2012.⁹⁵⁰ There were 21 instances of IDF personnel entering Palestinian schools.⁹⁵¹ Israeli military personnel conducting security sweeps ahead of Israeli settlers’ night-time religious events entered the Haj Ma’zoz Al Masri Secondary School for Girls in Nablus on six separate occasions.⁹⁵² Eleven other times, Israeli forces tried, sometimes successfully, to enter school premises, often during search operations, disrupting classes and sometimes damaging schools. Israeli forces fired tear gas or live ammunition at schools in another four instances in 2012.⁹⁵³ For instance, on 13 November 2012, Israeli police allegedly fired tear gas inside Aba Secondary Mixed School, causing 29 students to seek medical attention, after violence erupted when interior ministry officials attempted to post demolition orders for illegal building work.⁹⁵⁴

In 2012, Israeli settlers from the Yitzhar settlement threw stones at the Palestinian school in Urif (near Nablus) on four separate occasions. One incident, on 23 April 2012, triggered clashes between

Palestinians and Israeli forces and settlers during which teargas was fired, injuring eight Palestinian children.⁹⁵⁵

Demolition and stop-work orders

In 2011 alone, Israeli authorities issued nine schools in Area C of the West Bank with demolition or stop-work orders,⁹⁵⁶ bringing the total number of such schools to 38, including several considered at imminent risk, and affecting 4,300 children.⁹⁵⁷ Under these orders, schools cannot be rehabilitated to meet minimum humanitarian standards or can be demolished at any time.⁹⁵⁸ Such orders can represent a denial of access to education or a threat to deny access. A school in Khirbet Tana, near Nablus, was demolished in 2010 for the sixth time by Israeli forces. In Dkaika village, South Hebron, another was partially demolished in 2011.⁹⁵⁹ In 2012, Israeli authorities issued demolition orders against three Palestinian schools in Area C and East Jerusalem for being built without a permit.⁹⁶⁰ On 14 May 2012, Haaretz reported that a Palestinian elementary school was shut down after Israel's Civil Administration confiscated the vehicle used to transport teachers to it. The school also had a demolition order against it, although the nearest alternative school was 20 kilometres away.⁹⁶¹

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

In southern Israel, in April 2011, an anti-tank missile fired from the Gaza Strip struck a school bus, killing a 16-year-old boy and injuring the driver.⁹⁶² It was not possible to ascertain if it was targeted.⁹⁶³ Responsibility for the attack was claimed by the Al-Qassam Brigades, an armed wing of Hamas.⁹⁶⁴

In the West Bank, schoolchildren, teachers and other personnel faced intimidation by Israeli settlers and

military forces. Out of 101 communities surveyed by the Education Cluster and the Child Protection Working Group in 2011, 28 experienced settler violence against students and teachers and 26 experienced threats against them.⁹⁶⁵ In one case, at Qartaba School in Hebron, there were reports of pupils and staff being harassed or threatened. In October 2011, a guard at the school was allegedly assaulted by a group of settlers after he tried to stop them from throwing glass and empty bottles at the building.⁹⁶⁶ In December 2011, according to Ma'an News Agency, settlers allegedly tried to stab a sixth-grade pupil at the school and hit another who tried to defend him, while Israeli soldiers allegedly looked on without intervening.⁹⁶⁷ During the incident at a Palestinian school in Urif in April 2012 (mentioned earlier in the Attacks on schools section), in addition to throwing objects at schools, Israeli settlers physically assaulted children inside schools and on their way to and from school.⁹⁶⁸

One-quarter of Palestinian communities questioned in the 2011 Education Cluster and Child Protection Working Group survey also reported that schoolchildren, youth and teachers experienced Israeli military harassment or violence while en route to and from school, and 31 per cent indicated that students and teachers had to cross at least one military checkpoint to reach their schools, which affected more than 2,500 children each day.⁹⁶⁹ Sixteen per cent of children in the communities surveyed claimed to have experienced delays and harassment by military and security personnel while crossing these checkpoints or the separation barrier.⁹⁷⁰

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS

The UN found evidence of the military use of schools in the West Bank in 2011 and 2012. For example, in March 2011, the Israeli military used a school in the

village of Awarta as a detention and interrogation centre for two weeks after five members of an Israeli family were killed, allegedly by Palestinian youths.⁹⁷¹ In April 2011, Israeli forces broke into a Nablus school and went on the roof to provide security to a nearby area that settlers were visiting at night.⁹⁷² In 2012, there were two incidents of schools being occupied by the IDF.⁹⁷³ In one of the incidents, according to the International Middle East Media Centre, Israeli soldiers used a school east of Jenin city as a military post and monitoring tower in November 2012.⁹⁷⁴

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education was affected by similar violence. In Gaza, during Operation Cast Lead, 14 of the 15 higher education institutions were damaged, with six directly targeted, according to the Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights in Gaza. Three colleges and six university buildings were fully destroyed. The total damage was estimated at USD 21.1 million.⁹⁷⁵ Seven universities in Gaza were also damaged during Israeli airstrikes in November 2012.⁹⁷⁶

University students and faculty were injured or arrested by Palestinian and Israeli forces. In one incident, Gazan police entered the campus of Al-Azhar University in Gaza and attacked protesting students, allegedly beating them with clubs.⁹⁷⁷ According to media and human rights reports, Israeli security forces arrested 20 university students from 2009 to 2012.⁹⁷⁸ For example, Israeli forces reportedly detained a 20-year-old university student from Tulkarem city because of his graduate research project on the construction of a pilotless plane, which they said posed a threat to Israel's national security.⁹⁷⁹ One academic who called for a one-state solution was detained without charge by the Israeli authorities in 2011 and was still being held two years later.⁹⁸⁰ At least nine academics and university staff

were reportedly detained⁹⁸¹ by the Palestinian Authority – including eight from An-Najah University accused of being affiliated with Hamas and attempting to start a new university in the West Bank.⁹⁸²

Palestinian students and professors experienced restrictions on movement that negatively impacted their educational activities, including a blanket Israeli ban on travel for Gazan students and professors to study or lecture at Palestinian universities in the West Bank. In October 2009, the Palestinian interior ministry and an NGO campaigning for freedom of movement reported that 838 Gazan students who were formally offered places and/or enrolled at foreign universities were unable to leave Gaza because of travel restrictions and bureaucracy.⁹⁸³ Hamas also barred seven students from travelling to the United States for a year of study under a US programme, citing worries over their supervision.⁹⁸⁴

ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN 2013

A wide range of types of attack on education continued to be reported in 2013. These included demolition orders against primary and secondary schools in East Jerusalem and the West Bank,⁹⁸⁵ settlers stoning schools and students⁹⁸⁶ and school buses carrying students,⁹⁸⁷ acts of intimidation by settlers, the use of tear gas in and near Palestinian schools by Israeli police, and shootings of students by Israeli soldiers.⁹⁸⁸ Police found military weapons and explosives stashed in two schools in Israel.⁹⁸⁹ There were also reports that the Ministry of Education in Gaza was organizing military-style training for school children aged 15-17, with training provided by the Hamas National Guard and militants with Hamas's armed wing, the Al-Qassam Brigades, and that the Prime Minister was planning to extend it to 12-year-olds.⁹⁹⁰

ENDNOTES ISRAEL/PALESTINE

⁹¹³ This profile covers attacks on education in 2009-2012, with an additional section on attacks on education in 2013.

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⁹¹⁵ Ibid.; and HRW, World Report 2013: Israel/Palestine (New York: HRW, 2013).

⁹¹⁶ UNOCHA, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Consolidated Appeal 2013 (New York: UNOCHA, 2013), 27, 64-5; Interviews with teachers at Qurdoba school, Hebron, by Brendan O'Malley in May 2012.

⁹¹⁷ "Gaza Strip Profile," BBC News, last updated 6 January 2009; and "Gaza crisis: maps and timeline," BBC News, 6 January 2009.

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⁹¹⁹ UNOCHA, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Consolidated Appeal 2013 (New York: UNOCHA, 2013), 1, 64-5; and HRW, World Report 2013: Israel/Palestine (New York: HRW, 2013).

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⁹²⁵ The World Bank, "School enrollment – tertiary (% gross)," The World Bank Data (2009, 2011).

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⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁶ Education Cluster Damaged School Database, August 2013.

⁹⁴⁷ UNSC, Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General, A/67/845-S/2013/245, 15 May 2013, para 119.

⁹⁴⁸ UNSC, Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General, A/67/845-S/2013/245, 15 May 2013, para 120; and information provided by a UN respondent, 12 December 2013.

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