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# INDOCTRINATION & MILITARIZATION OF GAZA'S CHILDREN



## **Indoctrination & Militarization Of Gaza's Children**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

This report examines the systematic indoctrination and militarization of Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip, primarily orchestrated by Hamas. Through educational institutions, media, summer camps, and direct involvement in military operations, Hamas has created an environment where children are psychologically conditioned, trained and, in many cases, recruited for armed conflict. These practices constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), international criminal law (ICL), and international human rights law (IHRL).

Our analysis shows that Hamas engages in the recruitment and exploitation of children in ways that breach key legal standards, including the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This exploitation includes ideological indoctrination, paramilitary training, and the deployment of children as fighters, couriers, scouts, mules, and human shields.

The consequences for the affected children are profound. Many suffer from long-term psychological trauma and disrupted education. In addition, the institutionalized radicalization of Palestinian youth perpetuates cycles of violence and obstructs prospects for peace.

We call on the international community to enforce accountability mechanisms, support educational reform, and implement comprehensive reintegration programs. These actions are essential to protect children's rights, uphold international law, and disrupt the entrenched systems of abuse that undermine both justice and peace.

## **2. Introduction**

The exploitation of children in armed conflict is one of the most egregious violations of international law and human rights. In Gaza, Hamas has institutionalized a system of indoctrination and militarization that transforms children into instruments of violence. This report investigates the multifaceted processes by which children are ideologically conditioned, trained in combat, and used operationally in hostilities.

While Hamas is a non-state armed group, it operates within the territory referred to as the State of Palestine, which holds the status of a non-member observer state at the UN. In that capacity, the Palestinian authorities have declared adherence to a range of international treaties, including the Geneva Conventions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and

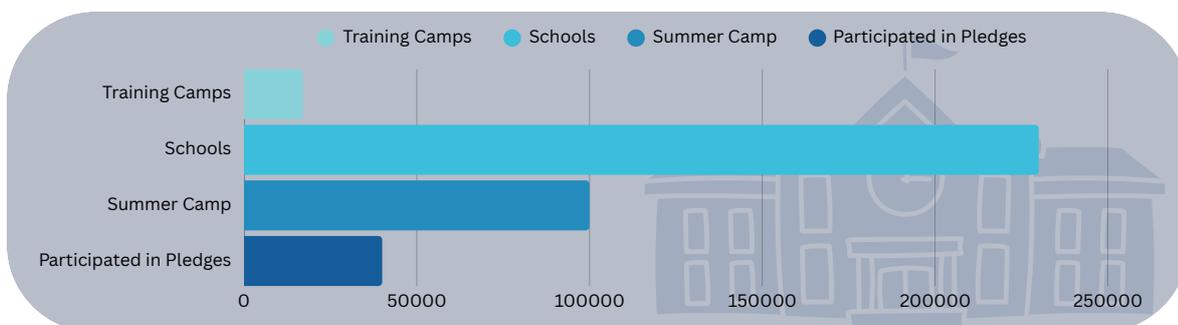
the Rome Statute. Accordingly, and irrespective of ongoing debates regarding the full attributes of statehood, these commitments carry legal implications. Both Hamas and the Palestinian authorities therefore bear distinct and serious responsibilities under international law.

This report outlines the legal framework governing the protection of children in conflict, documents the methods of child exploitation used by Hamas, and presents evidence of the long-term harm inflicted on affected children and communities. It concludes with actionable recommendations to address and prevent the ongoing abuse of Palestinian children in Gaza.

Our aim is to ensure that the international community confronts this systematic violation not only as a humanitarian concern but as a prosecutable crime that demands urgent and sustained action.

The international response must not only demand accountability for those directly responsible for the militarization of children, but also press for action from institutions responsible for education in Gaza. These bodies must be held to account for permitting, enabling, or failing to prevent the indoctrination of children. Moreover, the international community must urgently invest in reliable data collection mechanisms, including independent investigations and field reporting, to assess the full scope of this crisis and inform effective interventions.

### NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN HAMAS PROGRAMMING



Children's Army of Hamas, Israeli documentary, (April 2, 2015); available at: <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/New-Israeli-documentary-shows-Hamas-training-child-soldiers-395928>; *The Jerusalem Institute of Justice v. Ismail Abdel Salam Ahmed Haniyeh*, Communication to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (Sept. 13, 2018); available at: <https://ijj.org/advocacy-materials/militarization-of-children/>

## 3. From Ideological Conditioning to Combat Involvement

### 3.1. Ideological Indoctrination through Education and Media

Hamas' indoctrination of children begins at an early age, where they are exposed to formal and informal education that glorifies jihad.<sup>1</sup> Hamas' religious authority, the waqf, promotes

<sup>1</sup> Israel Defense Forces, *The Status of Children in Gaza* (25 January 2018), <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/the-hamas-terrorist-organization/the-status-of-children-in-gaza/>.

hardline Islamist indoctrination in Gaza, using fear-based tactics to coerce children into embracing its ideology, which is presented as the only true path.<sup>2</sup>

Many parents in Gaza, however, actively seek to shield their children from this system of ideological manipulation. One mother says she refuses to enroll her children in Qur'anic schools because of the ideological indoctrination imposed on students and the pressure to conform to extremist beliefs. These schools, she said, allow no room for independent thought, and she fears the long-term impact such teachings could have on her children.<sup>3</sup>

Another woman, 'Amna,' described how she would like her children to learn English and gain exposure to the world beyond Gaza. But with limited options outside Hamas-run institutions, and no financial means to afford private education, she feels trapped. She categorically rejected the idea of enrolling them in Qur'anic schools, explaining that these institutions glorify death and martyrdom and teach adolescents to pledge absolute loyalty to Hamas. She emphasized her desire for her children to grow up thinking critically and freely, without being conditioned to celebrate violence.<sup>4</sup>

**"ALL MUSLIM CHILDREN ARE THE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE AND BY THEIR HANDS, WITH ALLAH'S HELP, THE ACCURSED JEWISH STATE WILL BE TOTALLY DESTROYED."**

**AL-FATEH: THE HAMAS WEB MAGAZINE FOR CHILDREN**  
Issue 43, January 1, 2005



"God Save Palestine" from "Al-Fateh" Issue 109, October 1, 2007

In 2013, Hamas aired a children's television program on al-Aqsa TV in which kids, no older than ten, praised suicide attacks and expressed a desire to blow themselves up to "liberate" Jerusalem and all of Palestine. The segment featured the grandchildren of Maryam Mohammad Yousif Farhat, more commonly known as Umm Nidal - "mother of martyrs", a former Hamas MP from Gaza who publicly celebrated the deaths of her three sons in suicide

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Center for Peace Communications (@PeaceComCenter), *Just ask a Gazan mother. She wants a normal education for her kids, but their only option is a Hamas-run school — where children are indoctrinated to become "martyrs."*, X (Jun. 6, 2025), <https://x.com/PeaceComCenter/status/1904877381044609215>.

<sup>4</sup> *Whispered in Gaza – "What I Want for My Children"* (Center for Peace Communications Jan. 22, 2023), <https://www.peacecomms.org/videos/v/nxh3fzmk8b8ygy63959lp9ltbmb7lm>.

attacks against Israelis.<sup>5</sup> Umm Nidal stated "I already gave three sons, I have another seven [children] to give."<sup>6</sup>

Many schools in Gaza are named after convicted terrorists, sending a clear message about the role models children are expected to emulate. The **Dalal Mughrabi** High School for Girls, located in Gaza's Shujaiya neighborhood, is named after the perpetrator of the Coastal Road massacre, where she and other Fatah terrorists hijacked a bus and killed 38 civilians, including 13 children.<sup>7</sup>

The **Shadia Abu Ghazalah** School for Girls, located in Jabalia, is named after one of the first Palestinian female terrorists, who was killed while preparing a bomb for an attack in Tel Aviv that accidentally detonated.<sup>8</sup>

The **Salah Khalaf** Elementary School and Junior High School, also located in Jabalia, are named after the head of the Black September terrorist group, which was responsible for the murder of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics.<sup>9</sup>

Hamas also operates training programs in Gazan schools, where, for one hour a week, militants from the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades train school boys as young as 13 to use Kalashnikov assault rifles and other forms of weaponry.<sup>10</sup>

The glorification of terror extends beyond the classroom, with Hamas-controlled TV and media platforms routinely featuring content that celebrates martyrdom and encourages children to embrace jihadist values.

On a children's show on the Hamas-owned Al-Aqsa TV channel, young kids were asked what they wanted to be when they grow up. One of the children said that he wanted to be an

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<sup>5</sup> Times of Israel, *In Hamas TV Show, Gaza Children Sing Praises of Suicide Bombing* (Apr. 24, 2013), *Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/gaza-children-extol-virtues-of-jihad/>. [reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com)

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Myers, *How Hamas Promotes Sadism in Its War Against Israel*, *Flashpoint* No. 119 (Mar. 14, 2025), <https://isgap.org/flashpoint/how-hamas-promotes-sadism-in-its-war-against-israel/>

<sup>7</sup> Labour Friends of Israel, *Statement on Incitement: For DFID Assessment of PA Compliance with Partnership Principles* (2017), <https://www.lfi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Statement-on-incitement-for-DfID-assessment-of-PA-compliance-with-partnership-principles.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Israel Defense Forces, *Hamas Indoctrinates Palestinian Youth After Kidnapping*, IDF (June 22, 2014), <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/the-hamas-terrorist-organization/hamas-indoctrinates-palestinian-youth-after-kidnapping/>.

engineer, "so that I can blow up the Jews." The host responded: "Keep waging Jihad...when you grow up you will wage resistance against the Jews."<sup>11</sup>

Hamas' indoctrination efforts included a weekly Hamas-run online children's magazine. The website—al-Fateh (The Conqueror)—preached the value of carrying out acts of terror and planted a deep hatred of Israel. It depicted suicide bombers as idols and heroes, featured statements and interviews with Hamas leaders, and offered posters and photographs that glorified suicide bombers, forming a comprehensive platform to radicalize the younger generation.<sup>12</sup> Issue 40 from 2004 includes: "[I will do] to the Jews what the hawk does when it catches sight of its prey, it pounces on it quickly from the sky ... I don't want to cause pain to any person except the criminal Jews."<sup>13</sup>

In 2015, Hamas posted on its Facebook page pictures of a young boy wearing a military uniform and carrying an automatic weapon. The pictures were captioned, "These are our lion cubs. We have brought them up on the love of Jihad and martyrdom."<sup>14</sup>

This message was on display at the Childhood Festival of the Islamic Association in Khan-Yunis in April 2016, where Gazan children performed a play that included stabbing and executing Jews. A video posted of the event shows young children pretending to be Hamas fighters and features one girl saying, "You will die as a Martyr and blow up the enemies."<sup>15</sup>

### 3.2. Paramilitary Youth Camps

Every summer Hamas runs paramilitary training programs for children throughout the Gaza Strip to groom the next generation of fighters.<sup>16</sup> At these camps, over 100,000 students have been estimated to attend, where many receive paramilitary training starting at a young age and are exposed to Hamas' network of underground tunnels.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Middle East Media Research Institute, *Children Hamas TV: We Want to Wage Jihad and Blow Up the Jews* (Sept. 4, 2015), <https://www.memri.org/tv/children-hamas-tv-we-want-wage-jihad-and-blow-jews>.

<sup>12</sup> *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Teaching Terror: How Hamas Radicalizes Palestinian Society* (Feb. 12, 2007),

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/teaching-terror-how-hamas-radicalizes-palestinian-society>.

<sup>13</sup>IMPACT-SE, *Al-Fateh: The Hamas Web Magazine for Children* (Apr. 2016),

[https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Al-Fateh\\_IMPACT-SE.pdf](https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Al-Fateh_IMPACT-SE.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> *Supra* note 1.

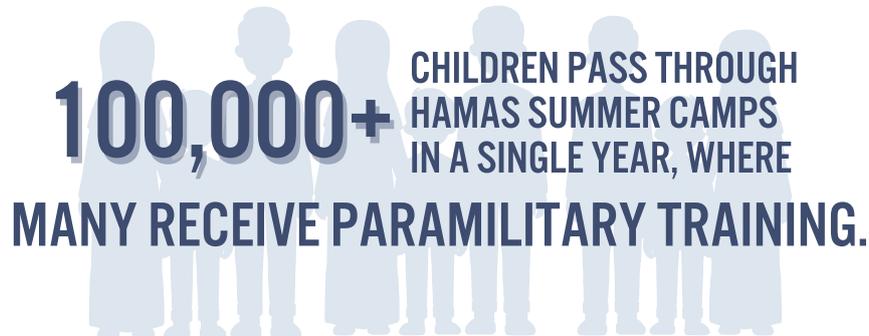
<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup>Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Summer Camps in the Gaza Strip: A Tool for Indoctrinating the Younger Generation with Radical Ideologies and Training Them to Become Future Operatives in the Terrorist Organizations, Especially Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad* (July 2014), <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/summer-camps-in-the-gaza-strip-a-tool-for-indoctrinating-the-younger-gene>

Uncovered documents in 2024 revealed directives from Hamas commanders on how to run children's summer camps with the goal of promoting jihadist values. The documents instruct camp organizers to inculcate the principles of jihad and armed resistance.<sup>18</sup>

**100,000+** CHILDREN PASS THROUGH  
HAMAS SUMMER CAMPS  
IN A SINGLE YEAR, WHERE  
MANY RECEIVE PARAMILITARY TRAINING.



Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Summer Camps in the Gaza Strip: A Tool for Indoctrinating the Younger Generation with Radical Ideologies and Training Them to Become Future Operatives in the Terrorist Organizations, Especially Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad* (July 2014), <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/summer-camps-in-the-gaza-strip-a-tool-for-indoctrinating-the-younger-generation-with-radical-ideologies-and-training-them-to-become-future-operatives-in-the-terrorist-organizations-especially-hamas/>

According to the website of the Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, "the goal of the camps is to fan the flames of jihad among the generation of liberation, instill Islamic values and prepare the long-awaited army for the liberation of Palestine."<sup>19</sup>

"(You are) the generation of rocks, the generation of rockets, the generation of tunnels, the generation of the suicide bombings," Ismail Haniyeh declared at a graduation ceremony for one camp in 2014.<sup>20</sup>

A video posted by a pro-Hamas YouTube account reporting on the 2016 Hamas military summer camps reveals footage of children undergoing training in tunnels, combat, and other military activities. According to an instructor interviewed in the video, the camps also include "lectures in which we motivate the students to wage Jihad for the sake of Allah."<sup>21</sup>

In 2021, a Hamas-run summer camp trained children to shoot soldiers at Jerusalem's Temple Mount and Al-Aqsa Mosque through computer simulations. Other activities included a simulated kidnapping of an Israeli soldier.<sup>22</sup>

[ration-with-radical-ideologies-and-training-them-to-become-future-operatives-in-the-terrorist-organizations-especially-hamas/](https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/summer-camps-in-the-gaza-strip-a-tool-for-indoctrinating-the-younger-generation-with-radical-ideologies-and-training-them-to-become-future-operatives-in-the-terrorist-organizations-especially-hamas/)

<sup>18</sup> *Times of Israel*, Herzog Reveals Hamas Documents Outlining Directives for Terror Summer Camps in Gaza (Jan. 7, 2024), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/herzog-reveals-hamas-documents-outlining-directives-for-terror-summer-camps-in-gaza/>.

<sup>19</sup> Middle East Media Research Institute, *Hamas and Islamic Jihad Summer Camps in Gaza: A Framework for Jihadi Indoctrination, Military Training* (June 28, 2021), <https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-and-islamic-jihad-summer-camps-gaza-framework-jihadi-indoctrination-military-training>.

<sup>20</sup> *Supra* note 10..

<sup>21</sup> *Supra* note 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Supra* note 18.

Some indication of the number of children involved may be gleaned from just one stage of the enlistment process. A 2015 documentary estimated that Hamas recruited approximately 17,000 children through its training camps.<sup>23</sup> In addition, by 2016, Hamas controlled schools in which over 230,000 children were enrolled.<sup>24</sup> These figures offer only a partial view, given the severe limitations on access to Gaza and the lack of transparent reporting. Nonetheless, they provide an alarming sense of the scale at which children are exposed to Hamas's militarized and ideological programs.

### 3.3. Operational Use of Children in Conflict

Hamas has illegally involved children in its military operations by deploying them in both direct and indirect roles, including assistance in attacks and use as mules, spotters, and human shields.

Children have been used to transfer ammunition, based on the assumption that the IDF would not target them; in one instance, explosives traveled hidden in bags of vegetables, carried by children. Children are also sent by Hamas to combat zones after attacks in order to assess the damage and report it to the fighters who are hiding in tunnels.<sup>25</sup> Footage has been uncovered showing young boys navigating Hamas tunnels in Khan Younis while carrying ammunition to militants.<sup>26</sup>

Palestinian Media Watch has further exposed how children are treated as tools of war. One child, 'Khaled', described his role in assisting Hamas operatives: "We, the children, are fulfilling missions of support for the Resistance fighters, by transmitting messages about the movements of the enemy forces or by bringing them ammunition and food. We are not aware of the movements of the Resistance fighters. We see them in one place, they suddenly disappear, and then reappear somewhere else. They are like ghosts, it is very hard to find

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<sup>23</sup> *Children's Army of Hamas*, Israeli documentary, (April 2, 2015); available at: <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/New-Israeli-documentary-shows-Hamas-training-child-soldiers-395928>

<sup>24</sup> *The Jerusalem Institute of Justice v. Ismail Abdel Salam Ahmed Haniyeh*, Communication to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (Sept. 13, 2018); available at: <https://jij.org/advocacy-materials/militarization-of-children/>

<sup>25</sup> Israel Defense Forces, *Hamas and Islamic Jihad Use Children for Terrorist Activities and Incitement* (Jan. 3, 2024), <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/idf-press-releases-israel-at-war/january-24-pr/hamas-and-islamic-jihad-use-children-for-terrorist-activities-and-incitement/>.

<sup>26</sup> Verity Bowman, *Children Led Through Gaza Tunnels, IDF Reveals* (Jan. 4, 2024), *The Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/01/04/children-tunnels-arm-hamas-israel-gaza/>.

them or hurt them."<sup>27</sup> In 2018, Hamas sent a seven-year-old girl to try and breach the Gaza security fence.<sup>28</sup>

Hamas leaders have openly admitted to sacrificing children for political purposes. Fathi Hammad said in 2008: "For the Palestinian people, death has become an industry, at which women excel, and so do all the people living on this land. The elderly excel at this, and so do the *mujahideen*<sup>29</sup> and the children. This is why they have formed human shields of the women, the children, the elderly, and the *mujahideen*, in order to challenge the Zionist bombing machine."<sup>30</sup>

In a 2008 Israeli military operation targeting Gaza militants, Hamas repeatedly urged civilians to gather near structures they anticipated the IDF would strike to protect the building from attack. Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV broadcast a specific appeal to children, calling them to form a human shield at Abu al-Hatal's home to protect the building from an expected Israeli Air Force strike.<sup>31</sup>

Former Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh called for the sacrifice of Gaza's children on 26 October 2023 to advance the group's war aims. He said: "The blood of the women, children and elderly [...] we are the ones who need this blood, so it awakens within us the revolutionary spirit, so it awakens with us resolve."<sup>32</sup> Children have been described as 'necessary sacrifices' by former head of Hamas in the Gaza Strip Yahya Sinwar.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hana Levi Julian, *Hamas Uses Children in Combat* (Jan. 14, 2009), *Israel National News*, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/129426>.

<sup>28</sup> Judah Ari Gross, *IDF: Hamas Cynically Sent 7-Year-Old Girl to Breach Gaza Border Fence* (Mar. 30, 2018), *Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-hamas-cynically-sent-7-year-old-girl-to-breach-gaza-border/>.

<sup>29</sup> "Mujahideen" (Arabic: "those who engage in jihad") is a term often used to describe Islamist fighters engaged in armed struggle. In the context of extremist groups, including Hamas, the term is frequently associated with militant combatants portrayed as religious warriors.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Fox & Salo Aizenberg, *Hamas's Human Shield Strategy in Gaza* (Henry Jackson Society, May 4, 2025), <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/HJS-Hamass-Human-Shield-Strategy-in-Gaza-Report-WEB.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> *Supra* note 27.

<sup>32</sup> Mayadeen TV (Lebanon) (Oct. 26, 2023), <https://www.memri.org/tv/hamas-leaderismail-haniyeh-gaza-bombing-new-holocaust-need-blood-women-children-elderly-awakens-spirit-resolve>

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

Hamas officials have also admitted that young children were used as labour to help construct their tunnel network, as they are prized for their ‘nimble bodies.’<sup>34</sup> Over a hundred have died due to arduous conditions and tunnel collapses.<sup>35</sup>

**“(YOU ARE) THE GENERATION OF ROCKS, THE GENERATION OF ROCKETS, THE GENERATION OF TUNNELS, THE GENERATION OF THE SUICIDE BOMBINGS.”**

**ISMAIL HANIYEH,  
HAMAS SUMMER CAMP GRADUATION CEREMONY 2014**

Labour Friends of Israel, Statement on Incitement: For DFID Assessment of PA Compliance with Partnership Principles (2017), <https://www.lfi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Statement-on-incitement-for-dfid-assessment-of-pa-compliance-with-partnership-principles.pdf>

#### **4. Legal Framework**

The indoctrination and militarization of children conducted by Hamas engages multiple violations under international law. Although Hamas is a non-state armed group, it operates within the territory of the State of Palestine, which is recognized as a party to key international treaties, including the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As such, both Hamas and the State of Palestine, as a state actor, bear their own respective legal responsibilities under international law. The State of Palestine has an obligation to prevent and prohibit the recruitment and use of children in hostilities within its jurisdiction, while Hamas is bound by customary international humanitarian law and treaty obligations that apply to non-state armed groups. Analyzing the actions of Hamas through the frameworks of IHL, ICL, IHRL allows for a comprehensive understanding of the legal violations involved. These frameworks work in unison to define the obligations of both state and non-state actors, to criminalize the exploitation of children in armed conflict, and to protect their fundamental rights. Together, they provide a foundation for accountability and rectification in the face of systemic abuse.

##### **4.1 International Humanitarian Law**

Although it is debated whether the Israel-Hamas conflict is an international armed conflict (IAC) or non-international armed conflict (NIAC), Hamas is responsible to abide by international humanitarian law regardless of how they are categorized. The provisions stated

<sup>34</sup> *Simon Wiesenthal Center, Wiesenthal Center Urges 47-Member UN Human Rights Council to Investigate Hamas Over the Deaths of 160 Palestinian Children Forced to Work on Terror Tunnels* (July 30, 2014), <https://www.wiesenthal.com/about/news/wiesenthal-center-urges-52.html>.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

below are customary to international law and regulate the conduct of both state and non-state actors.

Customary IHL, which extends to both state and non-state actors, prohibits the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, mandating they have a special protected status due to their vulnerability.<sup>36</sup> Rules 136-137 of Customary International Humanitarian Law declare that children must not be recruited into armed forces or groups and cannot take part in hostilities.<sup>37</sup> Central to IHL is the principle of distinction, which requires parties to a conflict to distinguish between combatants and civilians — including children — who must never be targeted or used in hostilities.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 codify these protections. Article 77(1) of Additional Protocol I provides that "children shall be the object of special respect" and Article 77(2) states they must not be recruited into armed forces or allowed to take part in hostilities.<sup>39</sup> Additional Protocol II, which applies to non-international conflicts, similarly prohibits the recruitment and use of children under 15 in armed forces or armed groups.<sup>40</sup>

Hamas, as a non-state actor engaged in sustained armed conflict, is bound by these rules and by customary international humanitarian law.<sup>41</sup> Its use of children in hostilities, including through military-style summer camps, ideological indoctrination, tactical training, and incentivized deployment, represents a clear violation of these principles. Hamas has systematically targeted children with propaganda, education, and training that prepares them for violent engagement with Israeli forces.<sup>42</sup> These practices blur the protected status of children as civilians and breach the IHL principles of distinction, proportionality, and humanity. Indoctrination constitutes not only a mechanism of coercion but also a form of

<sup>36</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, *Customary International Humanitarian Law Database*, Rule 135: Children, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule135> (last visited July 20, 2025).

<sup>37</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, Customary IHL Database, Rule 136. Recruitment of Child Soldiers (2005), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule136>; Rule 137. Participation of Child Soldiers in Hostilities (2005), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule137>.

<sup>38</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, *The Principle of Distinction* (Oct. 2002), [https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/war-and-law/03\\_distinction-0.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/war-and-law/03_distinction-0.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I) art. 77(1)–(2), June 8, 1977, 1125 U.N.T.S. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II) art. 4(3)(c)–(d), June 8, 1977, 1125 U.N.T.S. 609.

<sup>41</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, *Customary International Humanitarian Law Database*, Rule 139: Respect for International Humanitarian Law, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule139> (last visited July 20, 2025).

<sup>42</sup> Jerusalem Institute of Justice, *Submission for the Renewal of the Policy Paper on Crimes Against or Affecting Children* 16 (2023), <https://www.jij.org.il>.

psychological abuse that weaponizes children against their will or without their genuine understanding.<sup>43</sup>

## 4.2 International Criminal Law

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) classifies the conscription, enlistment, and use of children under the age of 15 in hostilities as war crimes. Article 8(2)(b)(xxvi) criminalizes these acts in the context of international armed conflict, while Article 8(2)(e)(vii) applies the same standard to non-international conflicts.<sup>44</sup> In the landmark case of *Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo*, the ICC Trial Chamber clarified that the act of conscripting or enlisting a child under the age of 15 is in itself criminal, regardless of whether the child is ultimately used in combat.<sup>45</sup> The Court further held that children under 15 are incapable of providing genuine, informed consent to join an armed group, and therefore consent is not a valid legal defense.<sup>46</sup> This precedent remains central to the understanding of how international law addresses the exploitation of children in warfare.

The ICC's decision in *Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen* reinforced these principles by sentencing Ongwen to 25 years' imprisonment for, among other crimes, conscripting children.<sup>47</sup> Ongwen's background as a former child soldier did not shield him from liability, demonstrating the Court's commitment to individual accountability regardless of personal history. These rulings are highly relevant to Hamas's actions. Hamas's recruitment and training of children—whether through explicit military instruction or ideological indoctrination—fall squarely within the scope of the Rome Statute. Indoctrination must be understood as a form of psychological coercion that facilitates enlistment.<sup>48</sup> The absence of explicit definitions for "enlistment" and "conscription" in the Rome Statute allows for a broader interpretation, which can encompass methods such as systematic ideological training, religious or political conditioning, and the glorification of martyrdom. These practices serve to compel children into a combatant role and should be treated as criminal acts under international law.

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<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court art. 8(2)(b)(xxvi), 8(2)(e)(vii), July 17, 1998, 2187 U.N.T.S. 90.

<sup>45</sup> *The Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo*, ICC-01/04-01/06, Decision 609 (Mar 14, 2012) [hereinafter *Lubanga*].

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* 613.

<sup>47</sup> Raphael Lorenzo Aguilang Pangalangan, *Dominic Ongwen and the Rotten Social Background Defense: The Criminal Culpability of Child Soldiers Turned War Criminals*, 33 AM. U. INT'L L. REV. 605 (2018).

<sup>48</sup> Jerusalem Institute of Justice, *Submission for the Renewal of the Policy Paper on Crimes Against or Affecting Children* 3 (2023), <https://www.jij.org.il>.

### 4.3 International Human Rights Law

International Human Rights Law, particularly as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), provides a complementary framework for protecting children from involvement in armed violence. Both instruments were ratified by the State of Palestine in 2014. Article 38 of the CRC requires that States take all feasible measures to ensure that children under 15 do not take part in hostilities.<sup>49</sup> OPAC goes further, urging non-state armed groups to refrain from recruiting or using persons under 18 "under any circumstances."<sup>50</sup> Though directed at States, these instruments reflect universally recognized norms that apply to all actors, including Hamas.

Hamas's conduct directly contravenes these obligations. The group employs a wide range of indoctrination techniques, including the use of school textbooks that glorify violence, televised performances that encourage armed struggle, and social media campaigns targeting youth.<sup>51</sup> A previous submission from the Jerusalem Institute of Justice (JIJ) documents that Palestinian children are taught to admire perpetrators of terrorism, such as Dalal Mughrabi, and are exposed to educational materials framing violence as a legitimate form of resistance.<sup>52</sup> These messages are reinforced through mass media and cultural performances, many of which are orchestrated or endorsed by Hamas or related entities. The use of summer camps to train children in firearms and tactics further embeds militarism in their daily experience.<sup>53</sup>



Israel Defense Forces, *The Status of Children in Gaza* (25 January 2018), <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/the-hamas-terrorist-organization/the-status-of-children-in-gaza/>.

<sup>49</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 38(2), Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S.

3, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

<sup>50</sup> Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict art. 4(1), May 25, 2000, 2173 U.N.T.S.

222, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-rights-child-involvement-children>.

<sup>51</sup> Jerusalem Institute of Justice, *Submission for the Renewal of the Policy Paper on Crimes Against or Affecting Children* 13 (2023), <https://www.jij.org.il>.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* 16.

These actions not only constitute recruitment and exploitation under OPAC but also violate the CRC's broader guarantees of protection from mental and physical violence, the right to education, and the right to development. Article 14 from the CRC guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which serves to protect them from coercive indoctrination by state and non-state actors.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child stated that education must be free from ideological indoctrination and should promote critical thinking, peace, and respect for diversity.<sup>55</sup> UNICEF's initiatives such as the "Children, Not Soldiers Campaign" undermines the importance of these legal principles.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4.4 Accountability and Command Responsibility

Under Article 28 of the Rome Statute, commanders and other superiors may be held criminally responsible for crimes committed by their subordinates if they had effective control over the perpetrators, knew or should have known that the crimes were being committed, and failed to prevent them or to submit the matter to competent authorities.<sup>57</sup> This doctrine of command responsibility is particularly relevant to the leadership of Hamas, many of whom are directly involved in the organization and supervision of youth indoctrination programs, military training camps, and recruitment campaigns.

These programs are not isolated incidents but part of a coordinated and institutionalized effort by Hamas to militarize children.<sup>58</sup> The use of children during the so-called "Great March of Return" protests, where they were placed at the front lines of violent demonstrations and promised monetary compensation in the event of injury, further illustrates Hamas's calculated use of children as instruments of political and military strategy.<sup>59</sup> The ICC's recognition in the *Lubanga* and *Ongwen* cases that indoctrination and psychological coercion can serve as methods of enlistment or conscription strengthens the argument for applying command responsibility to Hamas's leadership.

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<sup>54</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 14, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3,

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

<sup>55</sup> U.N. Comm. on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 1: The Aims of Education, U.N. Doc. CRC/GC/2001/1 (Apr. 17, 2001), <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/crc/2001/en/39221>.

<sup>56</sup> UNICEF, *Children, Not Soldiers* (May 14, 2014),

<https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/children-not-soldiers-yemen>.

<sup>57</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court art. 28, July 17, 1998, 2187 U.N.T.S. 90.

<sup>58</sup> Jerusalem Institute of Justice, *Submission for the Renewal of the Policy Paper on Crimes Against or Affecting Children*, 16 (2023), <https://www.jij.org.il>.

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

Beyond the individual and organizational levels of accountability, the State of Palestine bears distinct obligations under international law. As a non-member observer state at the United Nations, Palestine has ratified a number of principal international treaties and conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and the Rome Statute; the latter of which binds the State of Palestine to international criminal law. Accordingly, the State of Palestine is legally bound to ensure the effective implementation of these instruments within all territories under its control, including the Gaza Strip.

This responsibility has been expressly affirmed by relevant UN treaty bodies. In their concluding observations on Palestine's initial reports, both the Human Rights Committee and the Committee Against Torture underscored the State's obligation to take concrete measures to uphold human rights within Gaza.<sup>60</sup> These measures include ensuring accountability for violations and guaranteeing the protection of rights pursuant to international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Moreover, indoctrination has long-term and transgenerational consequences. Children raised in an environment that normalizes violence and martyrdom are more likely to engage in conflict themselves and to transmit these values to future generations.<sup>61</sup> This perpetuates cycles of violence and undermines efforts at peacebuilding. For these reasons, the international community—and the ICC in particular—should treat indoctrination not merely as a secondary concern, but as a central component of the criminal exploitation of children in armed conflict.

## **5. Long-Term Psychological and Societal Impacts**

### **5.1. Psychological Trauma and Mental Health Crisis**

Child soldiers who survive armed conflict face a markedly elevated risk of debilitating psychiatric illnesses, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>62</sup> Research in Palestine and Uganda has found that more than half of former child soldiers showed symptoms of PTSD, and nearly nine out of ten in Uganda screened positive for depressed

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<sup>60</sup> Human Rights Committee, *Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of the State of Palestine*, ¶ 6, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/PSE/CO/1 (July 24, 2023); Committee Against Torture, *Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of the State of Palestine*, ¶ 4, U.N. Doc. CAT/C/PSE/CO/1 (26 July 2022), available at OHCHR.

<sup>61</sup> Jerusalem Institute of Justice, *Submission for the Renewal of the Policy Paper on Crimes Against or Affecting Children* 17 (2023), <https://www.jij.org.il>.

<sup>62</sup> Elisabeth Schauer & Thomas Elbert, Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict, *The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering* 311–360 (2010), [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4419-5722-1\\_14](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4419-5722-1_14).

mood.<sup>63</sup> These experiences deprive children of normal and healthy development, severely impairing their integration into society as fully functioning members.<sup>64</sup>

The participation of children in conflict bears serious implications for their physical and emotional well-being. They are commonly subject to abuse and most of them witness atrocities such as killing, maiming, abduction, and sexual violence.<sup>65</sup> Many participate in the commission of violent acts, and some suffer serious long-term psychological consequences.<sup>66</sup>

For former child soldiers, the psychological impact is particularly acute. They may experience complex continuous trauma (CCT), which refers to prolonged and repeated exposure to multiple traumatic events and experiences, often beginning in early childhood and persisting over extended periods.<sup>67</sup> This can result in complex PTSD symptoms, emotional dysregulation, difficulty in relationships, negative self-perception, and a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Children exposed to high levels of violence in armed conflict are substantially more likely to exhibit aggression and anti-social behavior.<sup>68</sup>

**“[I WILL DO] TO THE JEWS WHAT THE HAWK DOES WHEN IT CATCHES SIGHT OF ITS PREY, IT POUNCES ON IT QUICKLY FROM THE SKY ... I DON'T WANT TO CAUSE PAIN TO ANY PERSON EXCEPT THE CRIMINAL JEWS.”**

**AL-FATEH: THE HAMAS WEB MAGAZINE FOR CHILDREN**

Issue 40, November 15, 2004



Al-Fateh: Issue 10, June 2003

<sup>63</sup> Neil Boothby & Bronwyn Nichol, *Child Soldiering: Impact on Childhood Development and Learning Capacity*, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (2010), <https://www.scribd.com/document/328940882/Child-Soldiering-Impact-on-Childhood-Development-and-Learning-Capacity>.

<sup>64</sup> Elisabeth Schauer & Thomas Elbert, Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict, *The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering* 311–360 (2010).

<sup>65</sup> Report of the United Nations Secretary General, *Children and Armed Conflict*, United Nations General Assembly, Security Council (June 17, 2025), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/878>.

<sup>66</sup> Report of the United Nations Secretary General, *Children and Armed Conflict*, United Nations General Assembly, Security Council (June 17, 2025).

<sup>67</sup> Iman Farajallah, *The Invisible Wounds of Palestinian Children*, *Psychiatric Times* (Mar. 28, 2024), <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/the-invisible-wounds-of-palestinian-children>.

<sup>68</sup> Tania Bosqui et al., *Psychological and Social Suffering of Another Generation of Palestinian Children Living Under Occupation: An Urgent Call to Advocate*, 26 *Health and Human Rights Journal* 147-150 (2024), <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2024/05/24/psychological-and-social-suffering-of-another-generation-of-palestinian-children-living-under-occupation-an-urgent-call-to-advocate/>

## 5.2. Disrupted Education and its Long-Term Consequences

Child involvement in armed groups directly leads to disrupted education, which has severe long-term consequences.<sup>69</sup> It not only hinders personal growth and cognitive development but also threatens their future economic and social stability, trapping them in cycles of poverty and insecurity.<sup>70</sup>

The negative effects of child soldiering on the educational and economic outcomes of former child soldiers are well-documented.<sup>71</sup> Children deprived of education are more likely to experience poverty and less likely to contribute meaningfully to society.<sup>72</sup> The disruption of education also creates a vacuum that can make children more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups, as a lack of opportunities and a sense of hopelessness can push them towards such affiliations.<sup>73</sup>

## 5.3. Radicalization and Perpetuation of Cycles of Violence

The environment in which Palestinian children grow up is characterized by what has been described as "institutionalized radicalization".<sup>74</sup> This systematic indoctrination, particularly through the educational system, plays a significant role in perpetuating cycles of violence and is leveraged by Hamas. This indoctrination directly contributes to the radicalization of youth, making them susceptible to recruitment by armed groups like Hamas.<sup>75</sup>

Some school curricula and textbooks repeatedly glorify violence and martyrdom, and remove peace agreements from their content.<sup>76</sup> For example, children learn poetry advocating for the elimination of "usurpers," and are encouraged to count martyrs.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, individuals responsible for terror attacks, such as Dalal Mughrabi, are presented as heroic role models,

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<sup>69</sup> Mohammad Qanet Ghulam, *Children's Right to Education in International Armed Conflicts: Gaza-Palestine*, 4(3) Modern Science and Research 429–455 (2025).

<sup>70</sup> Mohammad Qanet Ghulam, *Children's Right to Education in International Armed Conflicts: Gaza-Palestine*, 4(3) Modern Science and Research 429–455 (2025).

<sup>71</sup> Neil Boothby & Bronwyn Nichol, *Child Soldiering: Impact on Childhood Development and Learning Capacity*, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (2010).

<sup>72</sup> Neil Boothby & Bronwyn Nichol, *Child Soldiering: Impact on Childhood Development and Learning Capacity*, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (2010).

<sup>73</sup> Elisabeth Schauer & Thomas Elbert, Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict, *The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering* 311–360 (2010).

<sup>74</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Palestinian School Curriculum: Radicalisation*, 673 Hansard (2020), <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-03-10/debates/C9D591A4-1B68-4D6B-8AD3-5BBC90398051/PalestinianSchoolCurriculumRadicalisation>.

<sup>75</sup> *Id.*

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

<sup>77</sup> *Id.*

sending a message that killing is an act to be encouraged and honored.<sup>78</sup> This ideological conditioning, creates a fertile ground for the perpetuation of violence across generations. Children who survive armed conflict and are exposed to such narratives are substantially more likely to exhibit aggression and anti-social behavior, contributing to a cycle where victims can become perpetrators.<sup>79</sup>



Israel Defense Forces, The Status of Children in Gaza (25 January 2018), <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/the-hamas-terrorist-organization/the-status-of-children-in-gaza/>.

## 6. Recommendations for Prevention and Reintegration

### 6.1. Prevention Measures

Effective prevention of child indoctrination and militarization necessitates a combination of robust legal frameworks, educational reforms, and stringent accountability mechanisms. Including:

1. **Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Enforcement:** Despite the State of Palestine's accession to key international instruments like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), and the Rome Statute; a critical gap exists in its domestic legal framework. There are currently no criminal penalties for the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups, including Hamas.<sup>80</sup>
  - Domestic legislation which explicitly prohibits and criminalizes the recruitment and use of children under 18 by all armed groups, including non-state actors like Hamas, with appropriate penalties that reflect the gravity of these war crimes should

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

<sup>79</sup> Neil Boothby & Bronwyn Nichol, *Child Soldiering: Impact on Childhood Development and Learning Capacity*, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (2010).

<sup>80</sup> United States of America Department of Labour, *Child Labour and Forced Labour Reports: West Bank and the Gaza Strip*, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/west-bank-and-gaza-strip>.

therefore be enacted and enforced.<sup>81</sup>

**2. Educational Reforms and Counter-Indoctrination Initiatives:** The current educational environment, plays a significant role in perpetuating child militarization and is leveraged by Hamas.<sup>82</sup>

- A comprehensive reform of Palestinian educational curricula to remove all content that glorifies violence, incites hatred, demonizes any group, or promotes martyrdom, particularly narratives leveraged by Hamas should take place.<sup>83</sup> This reform should align with UNESCO standards for peace and tolerance in education, fostering critical thinking, mutual understanding, and respect for human rights. This includes revising textbooks, school names, and extracurricular materials that honor individuals involved in terror attacks.<sup>84</sup>
- Implement and scale up peace and justice education programs that foster empathy, non-violence, and conflict resolution skills among children and youth. These programs should provide alternative narratives to violence, emphasizing human rights, dignity, and the potential for a peaceful future.
- Establish robust oversight and regulation of youth movements, summer camps, and informal educational activities to prevent their use for military training or ideological indoctrination by armed groups like Hamas.<sup>85</sup> This requires transparent monitoring to ensure compliance with child protection standards.

**3. Accountability Mechanisms:** The absence of accountability for grave violations against children by all actors, including Hamas, emboldens disregard for international obligations.

- All alleged grave violations against children, including recruitment and use, abduction, and use of human shields by Hamas, must be subject to prompt,

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<sup>81</sup> United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/54/263, *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-rights-child-involvement-children>.

<sup>82</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Palestinian School Curriculum: Radicalisation*, 673 Hansard (2020).

<sup>83</sup> *Id.*

<sup>84</sup> *Id.*

<sup>85</sup> Benjamin Weinthal, *Exclusive: Hamas, Islamic Jihad accused of using child soldiers in war against Israel*, Fox News (Jan. 3, 2024), <https://www.foxnews.com/world/exclusive-hamas-islamic-jihad-accused-using-child-soldiers-war-against-israel?msocid=2f3b3e65ad296a2106b22a24ac456bc2>.

thorough, independent, and impartial investigations, and fair trials.<sup>86</sup>

- We call upon the international community to uphold accountability not only for Hamas leadership but also for institutional actors complicit in perpetuating indoctrination within Gaza’s educational system. International agencies with mandates over education in Gaza—including UNRWA and affiliated NGOs—must ensure that curricula and programming meet international standards of peace education and are free from extremist indoctrination. These institutions must be thoroughly audited, and any complicity or negligence should carry consequences.
- Simultaneously, we urge the international community to prioritize independent data collection on child militarization and indoctrination practices in Gaza. Transparent and methodologically sound research is essential to understanding the full extent of the violations and to formulating effective prevention and intervention strategies. Without reliable data, the scope of the abuse remains obscured, enabling further harm.

## 6.2. Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs

1. **Psychosocial Support:** The pervasive and continuous trauma experienced by former child soldiers necessitates extensive and specialized mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).<sup>87</sup>

- Implement and significantly expand community-based mental health and psychosocial support services across the Gaza Strip, specifically targeting former child soldiers and children at risk of recruitment. This should include therapies such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), art and play therapy, and storytelling, focusing on rebuilding trust and emotional regulation.

2. **Educational Opportunities and Vocational Training:** Educational and vocational opportunities are crucial for successful reintegration of former child soldiers.<sup>88</sup>

- Develop and implement flexible, accelerated, and catch-up education programs to

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<sup>86</sup> United Nations Secretary General, *Promotion and protection of the rights of children - Israel and the State of Palestine*, (June 3, 2024),

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/unsg-report-children-and-armed-conflict-2023-3jun24/>.

<sup>87</sup> Elisabeth Schauer & Thomas Elbert, Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict, *The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering* 311–360 (2010), [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4419-5722-1\\_14](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4419-5722-1_14).

<sup>88</sup> Elisabeth Schauer & Thomas Elbert, Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict, *The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering* 311–360 (2010).

help former child soldiers, quickly rejoin the formal schooling system or acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

- Offer vocational training and life skills programs tailored to market needs, empowering youth with practical skills for self-sufficiency and employment. These programs should include career counseling and support for income-generating activities to reduce the risk of re-recruitment due to economic desperation.<sup>89</sup>

**3. Community Engagement and Family-Based Programs:** Reintegration is most effective when it is community-based and involves families.

- Support youth empowerment initiatives that provide positive pathways for engagement, leadership, and contribution to society, thereby weakening "push and pull factors" towards violence and recruitment by armed groups. Engage community leaders, parents, and caregivers in child protection networks to identify at-risk children and prevent their association with armed groups<sup>90</sup>.
- Reintegration programs must be long-term, ideally spanning a minimum of 3-5 years per child, based on individual and community needs<sup>91</sup>.

## 7. The Lack of Independent Reporting

A significant challenge in confronting the abuses detailed in this report is the systematic underreporting and the severe lack of independent data collection on the ground in Gaza. The figures and incidents presented, while alarming, offer only a partial view of the crisis. This is largely due to Hamas' tight authoritarian control, which creates a climate of fear and reprisal against any who might report such abuses, effectively preventing independent monitoring. This information vacuum creates a shield of impunity, allowing these grave violations against children to persist without adequate international scrutiny or intervention.

This critical gap in reliable data directly obstructs accountability and the formulation of effective protection strategies. It is therefore incumbent upon the very international

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<sup>89</sup> Neil Boothby & Bronwyn Nichol, *Child Soldiering: Impact on Childhood Development and Learning Capacity*, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (2010), <https://www.scribd.com/document/328940882/Child-Soldiering-Impact-on-Childhood-Development-and-Learning-Capacity>.

<sup>90</sup> United Nations DDR Resource Centre, *Children and DDR* (2006), <https://www.unndr.org/modules/IDDRS-5.30-Children-and-DDR.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, *Child Reintegration: an Urgent and Strategic Priority for All*, (2019), <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/global-coalition-for-reintegration-of-child-soldiers/>.

mechanisms established with mandates for fact-finding and investigation in the territory to rigorously and impartially document these specific violations. Without methodologically sound research and independent field reporting, the international community cannot grasp the true extent of the abuses, and efforts to hold perpetrators accountable are fundamentally undermined. A continued failure to investigate and report on this systematic exploitation of children represents a dereliction of duty, enabling further harm and allowing the cycle of violence to persist.

## **8. Conclusion**

The militarization and ideological exploitation of children in Gaza is not incidental, it is deliberate, systematic, and politically instrumentalized. Hamas's policies and actions violate the fundamental principles of international law and inflict irreparable harm on Palestinian children, robbing them of their rights, their childhood, and their future.

The evidence presented in this report underscores the urgent need for a coordinated international response. Accountability must be pursued through international legal mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, and the State of Palestine must be held to its treaty obligations. Simultaneously, educational reform and long-term reintegration programs are essential to dismantle the structures that enable child recruitment and indoctrination.

The international community has a legal and moral duty to act. Palestinian children deserve protection, justice, and the chance to grow up in an environment free from violence, hatred, and fear. We urge all relevant actors: governments, civil society, international organizations, and legal bodies, to treat this issue with the urgency and gravity it demands.

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