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**Human rights situation in Palestine and other  
occupied Arab territories**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Maryam Ghasemi Educational Charity Institute, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 August 2024]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



# **Destruction of Schools in Gaza since October 7**

## **Introduction**

Since the escalation of conflict on October 7, 2023, the situation in Gaza has reached devastating levels, resulting in widespread destruction and humanitarian crises. Among the most affected are educational institutions, which have been targeted, damaged, or completely destroyed, severely hindering the right to education for countless children. This statement aims to highlight the catastrophic impact of these attacks on schools, emphasizing the urgent need for international attention, accountability, and action. As of July 30, 2024, all 625,000 students in Gaza have lost an entire academic year, with 39,000 students unable to take the Tawjihi (12th grade) exams, severely limiting their prospects for higher education. Many school buildings are now sheltering displaced families, filled with mattresses and makeshift barriers, while overcrowding has strained hygiene facilities and created unsanitary conditions that raise the risk of disease. This situation has harmed the mental health and educational rights of children, teachers, and caregivers. Since October 7, the forces of Occupying Power have killed 9,211 students and 397 educational staff, with over 14,237 students and 2,246 teachers injured. The educational infrastructure has been heavily impacted, with 92.9% of schools damaged and 84.6% requiring extensive repairs or reconstruction to resume classes. A significant portion of these affected schools are managed by UNRWA.

## **Context of the Conflict**

The ongoing conflict in Gaza has been marked by cycles of violence and retaliation, leading to tragic consequences for civilians. The recent escalation, particularly after October 7, 2023, has been particularly brutal. Reports indicate that, as of mid-October, over 90 educational facilities were either damaged or destroyed, affecting an estimated 300,000 students. According to the United Nations, military operations have resulted in at least 2,000 civilian deaths and over 10,000 injuries, many of whom are children.

## **Incidents**

there have been multiple instances of attacks on schools in Gaza in recent months, often resulting in casualties among students and educational staff. Schools have been targeted during conflict, leading to significant damage to buildings and disruption of educational services. These attacks have contributed to the broader humanitarian crisis, as many schools have been converted into shelters for displaced families.

On 6 June 2024, at approximately 2 am, Occupying Power forces targeted the classrooms on the highest floor of the Al-Sardi school in the Nuseirat refugee camp with two missiles in an airstrike. Up to 45 feared dead in this strike.

In a recent attack, on 4 August 2024, an Occupying Power airstrike hit two schools in Gaza City on Sunday, killing at least 30 people, Palestinian officials said, while the Occupying Power military said it struck a Hamas military compound embedded in the schools.

## **The Impact on Education**

### **1. Destruction of Infrastructure**

The physical destruction of schools has rendered numerous buildings unusable. For instance, a recent airstrike on Al-Aqsa Preparatory School on October 10 resulted in significant structural damage, forcing students to evacuate mid-lesson. Essential teaching materials and resources have also been lost, disrupting current educational programs and undermining the future potential of an entire generation.

## **2. Psychosocial Effects on Students**

Many children have witnessed horrific events, leading to severe psychological distress and anxiety. Reports from NGOs indicate that at least 40% of students in Gaza are exhibiting symptoms of PTSD, with increased cases of anxiety and depression following the attacks on educational institutions. The fear associated with airstrikes has made returning to school particularly traumatic.

## **3. Displacement and Access Issues**

With families displaced—over 600,000 people have fled their homes—children are unable to attend their schools. Makeshift shelters often lack necessary educational facilities, further complicating the provision of education. Many children are missing out on vital lessons and social development opportunities, jeopardizing their futures.

## **4. Impact on Teachers and Educational Staff**

Teachers have also been heavily affected. Many have lost their lives or been injured in the violence, and numerous others face loss of income due to school closures. For instance, reports reveal that at least 50 teachers have perished since the escalation, further eroding the already fragile education system.

## **Humanitarian Concerns**

1. **Violation of International Law:** The destruction of schools raises serious concerns regarding violations of international humanitarian law. The targeting of educational facilities compromises the rights of children to receive an education, a fundamental human right recognized by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. **Urgent Humanitarian Needs:** As the situation unfolds, the humanitarian needs in Gaza have surged. Access to food, clean water, and medical supplies has become critically constrained, exacerbating the vulnerabilities faced by the population. Organizations like UNICEF and the World Food Programme are urgently calling for funding and supplies to address these multi-faceted crises.
3. **Calls for Accountability:** These acts of violence against schools call for accountability. The international community must take a stand against such violations and ensure that those who infringe upon the rights of children face consequences.

## **The Role of the International Community**

4. **Immediate Actions Required:** There is an urgent need for the international community to respond decisively. Diplomats and world leaders must call for a ceasefire that includes explicit protections for educational institutions. Furthermore, initiatives must be established to facilitate the rebuilding of schools and infrastructure.
5. **Long-term Investment in Education:** Beyond immediate assistance, a long-term commitment to educational investment is crucial. Programs aimed at providing psychosocial support and educational continuity must be prioritized to help children recover and rebuild their futures.
6. **Public Awareness and Advocacy:** Increased public awareness is essential to mobilize support for the affected regions. NGOs, civil society organizations, and educational institutions globally must advocate for the rights of children and push for constructive dialogue aimed at resolving the conflict.

## **Conclusion**

The destruction of schools in Gaza since October 7 represents not only a humanitarian tragedy but also a violation of fundamental rights. As a global community, we have a moral responsibility to react and support the most vulnerable—our children. It is imperative to stand together to ensure that the right to education is upheld and protected, and that the voices of those affected are heard. Inaction is not an option; the cost of silence is too high.

## **Call to Action**

We urge all members of the Human Rights Council, NGOs, and civil society, to take immediate and effective action to protect educational institutions in conflict zones. Together, we can advocate for the right to education and contribute to a future where children can learn, grow, and thrive, free from the shadows of war.

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