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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, 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.

[26 May 2024]

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



The Reality of the Educational Sector in Gaza During the Current Genocide

Since October 7, 2023, the Gaza Strip has faced the largest and longest attack by the Israeli army by land, air, and sea, resulting in massive civilian casualties and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and homes. This attack has surpassed all previous ones in terms of losses, exacerbating the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which international reports had previously confirmed was no longer livable. The significant increase in the frequency of serious violations during this aggression has further worsened the conditions.

The extent of civilian and infrastructure losses in the Gaza Strip varies due to several factors, primarily the prolonged duration of the military attack that began on October 7, 2023, making it the longest and most intense of its kind. The attack involved intensive aerial, land, and naval bombardments, targeting the entire sector without exception and resulting in thousands of missing persons under the rubble. Civil defense personnel and equipment were also targeted, with repeated forced displacements occurring during the assault. The ongoing blockade, which constitutes collective punishment, has prevented the entry of UN and international bodies and foreign journalists. All these factors have contributed to the difficulty of monitoring the massive targeting of civilians and the extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure as the aggression continues.

According to the statistical report by Al Jazeera Network, the Israeli occupation army used approximately 70,000 tons of explosives during the 180 days of aggression on Gaza, leading to the complete destruction of 100 schools and universities and partial destruction of 305 schools and universities in the sector.(1)

About one hundred European academics condemned the genocide perpetrated by Israel against Palestinian civilians in Gaza since October 7, including the systematic destruction of the educational system. In a petition launched by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor titled "Erasing Education in Gaza: Israel's Systematic Annihilation of the Entire Educational System," they expressed deep concern over the Israeli army's targeting of academics, educational institutions, and cultural heritage sites in the Gaza Strip. They pointed out that the Israeli attacks have serious long-term effects, damaging about 70% of universities and colleges in the sector.(2)

Three university presidents and over 95 deans and professors were killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza, while 88,000 students were forced to interrupt their university education, and 555 students were unable to travel on international scholarships. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Education, more than 4,327 students were killed, 7,819 were injured, and 231 teachers and administrators were killed and 756 were injured. Academics have confirmed that these attacks amount to a level of cognitive killing, affecting the future of Palestinian youth. The systematic targeting of civilian targets, including protected historical and cultural sites, constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law and a war crime under the Rome Statute, and is also classified as genocide.(2)

The systematic destruction of the Palestinian education system in Gaza has raised serious concerns among UN experts, with more than 80% of schools damaged or destroyed in what is termed "educational killing." This term refers to the obliteration of education through the killing or detention of teachers and students and the destruction of educational infrastructure. After six months of military assault, over 5,479 students, 261 teachers, and 95 university professors have been killed, with over 7,819 students and 756 teachers injured. Sixty percent of educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed, including 13 public libraries, leaving 625,000 students without access to education. Without safe schools, women and girls face additional risks, including gender-based violence.(2)

UN experts also noted that the ongoing attacks on educational infrastructure in Gaza have a devastating long-term impact on people's rights to education and expression, depriving another generation of Palestinians of their future. They highlighted the prevention of scholarship students from joining universities abroad and the targeting of UN schools sheltering displaced persons, including the "safe zones" designated by the Israeli army.

They emphasized that these attacks are not isolated incidents but part of a systematic pattern of violence aimed at dismantling the foundation of Palestinian society.(3)

Ajith Sungai, the head of the United Nations Office for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, declared that the educational system in Gaza "no longer exists" due to the destruction of schools by Israeli airstrikes and their use as shelters for displaced persons. He stated, "Children can no longer find a place to learn." In a report released on December 13, 2023, the Euro-Mediterranean Observatory revealed that the Israeli army had converted schools housing 10,000 displaced persons into military centers and field execution sites. The Observatory received testimonies of the Israeli army carrying out field execution operations and killing Palestinian civilians after detaining them for several days inside the same schools they had sought refuge in from violence.(4)

Ted Cheban, Deputy Director of Humanitarian and Supply at UNICEF, warned of a severe malnutrition crisis in Gaza, cautioning about declining child nutrition rates that could lead to fatalities and long-term health problems. The statement issued by UNICEF indicated that 90% of children under the age of two and 95% of pregnant and lactating women suffer from acute malnutrition, with significant challenges in accessing sufficient nutritious food.(5)

The UNRWA spokesperson pointed out that hundreds of thousands of Gaza residents suffer from psychological and mental illnesses as a result of the shocks and horrors brought about by war, displacement, and deprivation. United Nations experts affirmed that over a million Palestinian children in Gaza need psychological and social health support, as they will suffer from the trauma of this war throughout their lives.(6)

Based on international and regional reports and evidence, the violations committed by the Israeli occupation in the Gaza Strip are considered war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law. This includes targeting civilians, schools, universities, cultural sites, homes, cutting off food, water, and medicine, and targeting teachers and students. According to Article 85 of the Optional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1977, indiscriminate destruction and causing serious harm to public and private property and lives constitute war crimes. Article 8(2)(b)(i+ii) of the Rome Statute also defines the war crime of attacking civilians and civilian objects. Moreover, the destruction of schools and universities by over 80% is considered a war crime according to Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, indicating systematic and widespread targeting that violates international humanitarian law.

Recommendations:

- Accountability and impunity should not be limited to the criminal realm. Efforts and focus should also be directed, with equal importance, towards civil responsibility and compensation for serious violations of international law during the aggression on Gaza, including destruction of schools and universities and targeting of teachers and students.
- Collective and persistent action, utilizing all UN mechanisms and diplomatic tools, is necessary to ensure full, sustainable, and unrestricted entry of humanitarian and relief aid, with priority given to ensuring full access of persons with disabilities and full medical requirements to the Gaza Strip.
- Give priority to restoring and rebuilding colleges, universities, and other educational establishments that have been harmed or destroyed. International organizations and donors ought to be enlisted to contribute the money and materials required for this endeavor.
- It is important to provide and execute reliable remote learning strategies to guarantee the continuation of education in emergency situations. This entails giving students access to electronic devices, internet connectivity, and virtual classrooms. Curricula for remote education can be made more flexible and culturally appropriate with the support of partnerships with international educational organizations.

- Expand scholarship programs and create opportunities for Palestinian students to study abroad. This can help mitigate the disruptions to higher education caused by the conflict and provide students with the chance to continue their studies in a safe and supportive environment. Collaboration with universities worldwide can facilitate these opportunities.
- Create global networks of solidarity and support to exchange resources, knowledge, and best practices for the development and rehabilitation of education. These networks can offer a venue for cooperation between academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, governments, and other parties devoted to meeting Gaza's students' educational requirements.

(2) The extermination of education in Gaza: one hundred European academics sign a Euro-Mediterranean petition condemning Israel's systematic destruction of the educational system, Euro-Mediterranean Observatory for Human Rights, March 12, 2024. On the electronic link:
<https://euromedmonitor.org/ar/article/6219/>إيداءة التعللمفمغزة: مائة أكادلممأوروبمبوقعو نعلعر بمضالأمورومتوسطمبندبندممر! سرانملا المنهجالنظامالتعللمم

(3) UN experts deeply concerned over 'scholasticide' in Gaza. 18 April 2024.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>

(4) UN experts deeply concerned over 'scholasticide' in Gaza. 18 April 2024.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>

(5) the official website of the World Health Organization is at the link: <https://tinyurl.com/3xcjmvkm>

(6) UN experts deeply concerned over 'scholasticide' in Gaza. 18 April 2024.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>