

UN calls for probe into Israel's use of lethal force against children



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United Nations, December 4 (RHC)-- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has called for a transparent investigation into the use of lethal force by Israeli troops against Palestinian children.

The "UN Human Rights Office calls on Israel to promptly, transparently and independently investigate all instances of (Israeli army) use of force that have led to killing or injury and to hold those responsible accountable," it said in a statement.

The UN body also warned Israeli forces against using disproportionate force and live ammunition against Palestinian children across the occupied lands. "In accordance with international law, use of lethal force is only allowed as a measure of last resort, in response to a threat to life or of serious injury," it said.

"Stone-throwing does not appear to constitute such threat. In addition, force must always be used in a manner which causes the least possible harm. Shooting in the head or upper body does not appear to conform with this requirement."

Between November 17 and 29, several Palestinian children were critically injured when Israeli soldiers used live ammunition and rubber-coated metal bullets. On November 29th, a 16-year-old boy was shot in the chest and critically injured in al-Bireh city.

On November 27, during protests in Kafr Qaddum village in the north of the West Bank, soldiers shot a 16-year old boy in the head with a rubber-coated metal bullet. The boy fell from the impact and is hospitalized with a fractured skull.

On November 17, a 15-year old boy on his way back from school lost his right eye after being hit by ricochet ammunition in Qalandia refugee camp north of Jerusalem al-Quds.

"All injuries resulted from the use of potentially lethal force in circumstances where available information suggests the children did not pose a threat to life or serious injury of the soldiers or to anyone else," the UN body said.

Israel has a long history in wounding and killing Palestinian children, especially during anti-occupation protests. Israeli forces have used tear gas, stun grenades, rubber-coated bullets and live ammunition against demonstrators, including children.

In March 2019, UNICEF said about 40 Palestinian children had been killed and hundreds more wounded in a year of anti-occupation protests along the fence that separates the besieged Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories.

In April this year, the Palestinian Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs Commission said in a report that nearly 200 Palestinian children were kept behind bars in Israeli prisons in inhumane conditions. Qadri Abu Baker, the head of the commission, denounced the UN at the time for failing to "provide the minimum protection for the Palestinian children" against the physical and psychological abuse in Israeli jails.

Abu Baker said Israeli forces had arrested more than 17,000 minors since 2000. In most cases, he added, the children under the age of 10 were detained.

According to figures by the Defense for Children International, between 500 and 700 Palestinian children at the age of 12-17 are arrested and tried in Israeli military courts every year.

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