



רופאים לזכויות אדם
أطباء لحقوق الإنسان
Physicians For Human Rights



Lost Childhood

**Gaza Community Mental Health Program (GCMHP), Defence for Children International/Palestine Section (DCI/PS), and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel condemn the use of a Palestinian child to carry explosives, and the Israeli Occupation for using him in their propaganda.
Keep children away from military acts.**

If Israel's allegations prove correct, ten years old K was used for passing explosives without his knowledge on Monday 15 March 2004. The three organizations call on both Palestinians and Israelis not to use children in military actions, nor make them the victims of such acts.

At the age of ten, K was working at Hawara checkpoint, near Nablus, after school hours. His work was a small financial contribution to his impoverished family. Children his age should go home, do their homework and play, but in the Occupied Territories in general, and in Balata refugee camp in particular, childhood is lost amidst the Israeli oppressing occupation and the Palestinian struggle.

High levels of unemployment are one of the more devastating effects of the Israeli policy of closure and curfews. According to the World Bank report¹, 60 percent of the population in the West Bank and Gaza live under a poverty line of US\$2 per day. Many children, who can move in relative freedom compared with their parents, are supporting their families, by finding odd-jobs. One of these jobs is carrying bags at the checkpoints.

A victim of some irresponsible adults in his own society, K was used to carry explosives through the checkpoint. Without his knowledge, his childhood innocence was betrayed by those who should have known better.

When the explosives were found, one would assume that maybe now, at last, the child can be left alone. But in this struggle, nothing is sacred. The Israeli media had spread K's pictures on the front pages of the morning newspapers, giving his full details. Media reports did not emphasize his innocence but rather connected the incident² to another report which once again exposed and exploited children who declared their wish to become a martyr. The fact that this specific child knew nothing and had no such intents went almost unnoticed, thus dehumanizing the Palestinian people and their children. In an internet news site, one of the reporters cared little of K's life; he was however, very upset, that the Israeli propaganda did not use him better as a "propaganda bomb" expecting it will justify all of the evils of occupation.

¹ The World Bank, *Two Years of Intifada, Closures, and Palestinian Economic Crisis – An Assessment*, March 5, 2003

² reports in Israel's channel 10.



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Palestinian children are raised in a grim present and with grim prospect for the future. Among the shocking findings in a survey done by GCMHP³, on children in Gaza are 83.2 percent witnessed shooting, and 66.9 percent saw injured or dead. Levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are high - 32.7 percent suffer from acute level, while 49.2 percent from moderate. It is no surprise, therefore, that their own prospects for the future are grim: while 66 percent wished to concentrate on school issues, a fourth thought of martyrdom and only 8.7 percent on peace.

According to the law in Israel minors deserve special protection from publicity that may harm them. It seems that more than the strict law has been violated. As far as K is concerned, morality and humanity have been forgotten. Each for his own sacred cause forgot the child.

In order to make childhood secure, responsible adults must step up; responsible adults need to not only keep children away from the conflict while it lasts, but also to work for a peaceful and just solution.

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www.gcmhp.net

www.phr.org.il

www.dci-pal.org

³ Dr. Samir Qouta, *Prevalence of PTSD among Palestinian children 2003*