

No Way To Treat A Child (and how you can help)

Many human rights violations are associated with the illegal Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza. But one of the most brutal is the abusive treatment of Palestinian children by the occupying forces over the past 49 years.

More than 2 million Palestinian children under the age of 18 live in the Palestinian territories. They are almost half the population subject to Israeli occupation. In recent years, one international NGO after another has come forward to document human rights violations against these children. They include UNICEF, Human Rights Watch, the Israeli human rights watchdog, B'Tselem and others.

Minnesota Congresswoman Betty McCollum is currently circulating a letter for other members to sign, requesting the President to review the evidence of abuse and press Israel to stop. In her own words,

“A report released in April by Defense for Children International-Palestine, based on the testimony of 429 Palestinian children detained by the Israeli military or police, found that three-quarters endured some form of physical violence following arrest. Israeli interrogators used position abuse, threats, and even solitary confinement to coerce confessions from some of these children. Such blatant abuses are unacceptable and contrary to US interests and values.

“The situation on the ground is rapidly deteriorating and we must act now. At the end of February, there were 440 Palestinian children in Israeli military prisons...the highest number since data became available in 2008....Israel has reintroduced the use of administrative detention against children....whereby a child can be detained without charge or trial, often renewable indefinitely.”

While Israelis living in the occupied territories are protected by Israeli civil and criminal law, Palestinians living there have access only to Israeli military courts. And when they are “administratively detained,” they have access to no court at all: they are held without charges and without trial. In 97 percent of cases, children had no parent or legal counsel present during their interrogation.

According to UN sources, military courts have convicted over 700,000 men, women and children since the occupation began in 1967. The US State Department human rights report (2014) found that Israeli military courts prosecute between 500 and 700 children each year. In February there were 440 Palestinian children in Israeli military prisons. A UNICEF report found that ill treatment in the military detention system remains “widespread, systematic and institutionalized throughout the process.” Small wonder that the rate of “convictions” is 99 percent.

Though it ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, Israel has violated key juvenile justice standards, such as: Children should only be deprived of their liberty as a measure of last resort, and No physical violence or torture.

Israel is usually praised by US political leaders as a beacon of democracy and humane values in the troubled Middle East. But only a tiny handful of Jewish Israelis have pressed the government and public to recognize and respect the humanity of Palestinians, including children. And the task has gotten harder. This week, the human rights leader, BTselem, announced that it would no longer bring evidence of misconduct by the military to the military courts, because the evidence has been systematically ignored or even used to intimidate witnesses.

At JVP, we think it is time for the US to reconsider the terms of its relationship with Israel. If, as the politicians say, we truly have an “unbreakable bond” then it ought to be strong enough to bear some well-deserved criticism when Israel violates human rights.

Rep. McCollum is still collecting signatures from her colleagues until next Friday. So far no Connecticut representatives have joined her. **You can learn more about this at www.NoWayToTreatAChild.org. Then call Representative Rosa DeLauro’s office and say “Please sign Betty McCollum’s letter.” (203) 562-3718**

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