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Stop Blaming Israel for the Weaponization of Children by the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad

By Dr. Deborah Soffen*

The UN must finally hold accountable the PA, Hamas, PIJ and all other entities brainwashing children into a culture of genocidal hate and training the next generation of terrorists.



The sons of al-Nasser Salah al-Deen Brigades militants, the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees, take part in a show of force on the border with Israel on June 16, 2015

Photo by Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Recently the UN Secretary General's annual report on "Children and Armed Conflict" (CAAC) was released, covering January to December 2022. The report's noble goal of "engagement with parties responsible for violations that might lead to behavioral change, including promotion of accountability and compliance with child protection provisions in peace processes" is one the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) would fully embrace had the UN's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, ensured that the "verified grave violations" she included in the section titled "Israel and the State of Palestine" reflected the full, factual facts on the ground.

The key phrase throughout the report is "parties responsible." Acknowledging who are the actual responsible parties for grave violations against Palestinian and Israeli children is essential in order for all concerned to grow up in a region that respects their rights as children. Prime among these is a child's right to be protected from violence.

While the CAAC refers to the "State of Palestine," Special Representative Gamba does not name the Palestinian Authority, instead calling out only Palestinian Islamic Jihad and unnamed "Palestinian armed groups":

"I am deeply concerned by the increase in the killing and maiming of children by Palestinian Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds Brigades.

"I call upon all Palestinian armed groups to cease indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars from densely populated areas in Gaza towards Israeli civilian population centers.

"I urge all Palestinian armed groups to protect children, including by preventing them from being exposed to the risk of violence and by abstaining from instrumentalizing them for political purposes.

"I reiterate my call upon armed groups to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and to abide by their domestic and international legal obligations."

Welcome words. But then she adds this Orwellian plea : "I exhort Palestinian armed groups to better protect schools."

Better protect? Somehow lost in translation was UNRWA's own condemnation of Hamas for hiding terror tunnels and weapons under its school in Gaza in December 2022.

Whereas statistics on the recruitment of children used in combat and other roles is diligently included in other regions of conflict in this report, conspicuously absent is any accounting of Palestinian children recruited by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the PA for combat. Moreover, nowhere is the Iranian regime—the chief destabilizing power in the region—called out for funding those entities and inciting and recruiting children to partake in the “armed struggle” against the state of Israel. While the use of children as human shields is condemned—it is Israel, not Hamas, that CAAC charges with deploying this inhumane tactic, perpetuating the UN’s long history of discrimination against the Jewish state.

The CAAC report, in effect, provides a moral free pass for Palestinian teenage terrorists while disingenuously insisting that Israel must take steps not to harm these “children.” When asked at the press conference for the report’s release whether the figures for Palestinian children who were killed, wounded, or detained by Israel should exclude heavily armed teen militants, Special Representative Gamba declared that it was “regrettable” but immaterial to the report.

“A child is a child is a child, including when they are perpetrators of violence,” Gamba said.” She further bestowed legitimacy on terrorist groups by welcoming letters received from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad that purportedly contained “practical measures” from these terrorists. Think of a UN 9/11 report praising constructive communications from Al Qaeda.

As for Israel, the UN Special Representative charged:

“I am deeply concerned by the continuing increase in the number of children detained by Israel and by the reports by children of physical violence directed against them during detention. I reiterate my call upon Israel to uphold international juvenile justice standards... to end the administrative detention of children, and to prevent any violence and ill-treatment in detention.”

Given the Special Representative’s declaration that “a child is a child is a child,” is it not “societal child abuse” that Palestinian children are being put in harm’s way? Who is to blame when an armed Palestinian teen indoctrinated and recruited to murder Jews and become a martyr, is neutralized by Israel’s security forces? Does the world expect that IDF soldiers must first check an ID to see if a terrorist firing his weapon has reached his 18th birthday?

To change the deadly status quo, the world should look at how Palestinian children are spending their summer vacations. The Simon Wiesenthal Center urges UN Secretary General Guterres to send a personal envoy back to Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem to investigate an authoritative report—just released by the respected MEMRI institute. It addresses the indoctrination of Palestinian children in 630 summer camps this year. The MEMRI report homes in on the one issue Special Representative Gamba does not: Why are Palestinian youth turning to terrorism and genocidal hate? Who are the perpetrators? Who are the funders?

Two excerpts from MEMRI provide some disturbing answers:

“Operated by the PLO’s Higher Council for Youth and Sports, which is headed by Fatah Central Committee member Jibril Rajoub, the camps were attended by some 65,000 boys and girls. The camps are platforms for political indoctrination and incitement against Israel. This year, as in the past, the content they imparted included glorification of terrorists (see Part I of this report), non-recognition of Israel and calls for the return of the Palestinian refugees to their original homes, including inside Israel. As part of inculcating the narrative of the right of return, activities often included the motif of the key as a symbol of this right.”

And the report identifies key funders of these camps:

“It should be noted that the PLO’s Higher Council for Youth and Sports, which operates the camps, has received funding in the past from the EU and from UN organizations, including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Today it continues to be the official Palestinian organ that collaborates with international bodies on youth empowerment projects, including with the UN and EU, which provide it with mentoring and counseling services.”

We all associate summer camp with fun, socialization and personal growth. But in Palestinian society, that is not the reality on the ground. Secretary General Guterres: There is so much more that UN agencies can do to protect Palestinian and Israeli children, but step #1 is to finally hold accountable the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and all other entities brainwashing children into a culture of genocidal hate and training the next generation of terrorists.

Failure to dismantle the deadly status quo will only ensure another lost generation, with peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land, a distant unattainable dream.

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