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Abstract:

Children living in a conflict environment: the Palestinian case.

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The current situation in the Palestine territory can be characterized as a chronic state of hazardous environment to children.

Just to give a summary of the demographic status: out of the estimated 3.6 million inhabitants of the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) in 2003, 1.6 million are officially registered as refugees and live both within and out side refugee camps. In the Gaza Strip alone, 70% of the population are refugees, while 30% of the West Bank of the population are refugees. As many as 53% of the population of OPT, or 1.9 million inhabitants, are bellow the age of 18, with a median age of 18 in the West Bank and 15 in Gaza. To include the World Bank estimates that the poverty level had reached 59% by the end of 2002, or about double the figure of 2000.

Children's right to health and to life is under serious threat in the OPT. Progress made in children's health since the Palestinian authority took over responsibility in 1994 is stagnating. Certainly, the turbulent political reality not only intensified the existing causes leading to child mortality, but it also possesses new dangers on the survival and health of Palestinian children. The full impact of incursions, border closures and curfews on the health status of children in the OPT will only be reflected in long term health indicators. Statistics as of January 2005 show that a total of 689 (18%) of Palestinians killed were children less than 18 years of age. During the period between 29of Sept.and the 31of December15000 child was injered(39%) and from these 30% remained with permanent disability. An estimated 600 Palestinian children have been arrested every year since the beginning of the conflict. Nutritional surveys indicated an acute malnutrition (wasting) of 2.5% in 2002. A national survey on child labor showed an increase in children under the age of 18 working from 10% in 2001 to 23% in 2003.

To include, the building of the apartheid wall, caused further constraints on access to basic daily needs; including schooling, emergency care and health services, as well as direct displacement of families. Further, the daily humiliation and harassments faced by children passing daily through these gates may result in scars that will hamper the development of any child.

This presentation will reflect well documented details (national and international) on the impact of this current environmental situation on the lives of our children. The noted threats as well as the psychosocial impact on children will have repercussions for many years to come; therefore collaboration on all levels is needed to call upon implementation of international agreements towards child protection.