

# UN adding Israel to 'blacklist' of countries harming children in conflict

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Online Desk :

The United Nations is adding Israel to its so-called "blacklist" of countries that have committed abuses against children in armed conflict, an Israeli diplomat has confirmed, as thousands of Palestinian children have been killed in the Israeli military's continued assault on the Gaza Strip. In a social media post on Friday, Israeli Ambassador to the UN Gilad Erdan said he received official notification of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's decision.

"This is simply outrageous and wrong," Erdan wrote, alongside a video of him speaking into a telephone and condemning the move. "I responded to the shameful decision and said that our army is the most moral in the world. The only one being blacklisted is the Secretary-General who incentivizes and encourages terrorism and is motivated by hatred towards Israel." Commenting on Erdan's remarks later in the day, Guterres's spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said a UN official had called the Israeli envoy as "a courtesy afforded to countries that are newly listed on the annexe" of the annual "Children in Armed Conflict" report.

"It is done to give those countries a heads-up and avoid leaks," Dujarric told reporters, adding that the report is set to be presented to the UN Security Council on June 14 and then officially published a few days later. "Ambassador Erdan's video recording of that phone call, and the partial release of that recording on Twitter, is shocking and unacceptable – and frankly something I've never seen in my 24 years serving this organisation," Dujarric said.

Palestinian Authority welcomes decision

The annual report on children in armed conflict compiles "a list of parties engaging in violations against children", including killing and maiming, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals. Guterres faced criticism from Palestinian rights advocates for failing to place Israel on the so-called list of shame, which included Russia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Syria and Haiti. The blacklist is meant to call out parties engaged in abuses against children. But other countries can use it to restrict arms sales to the offenders.

Senior Palestinian official Riad Malki welcomed the UN's decision on Friday, saying that the move is overdue. "Now, faced with the catastrophe in Gaza that the world sees with its naked eyes with the genocide that specifically targets children and women, the UN secretary general no longer has excuses not to place Israel on the blacklist," Malki said in a statement.

Rights groups have condemned the dire toll Israel's bombardment and siege of Gaza has had on Palestinian children across the enclave. More than 36,700 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks since early October, including 15,571 children, according to the Gaza government media office. UN experts have also said Israel's restrictions on deliveries of food, water, medicine and other critical supplies have created a humanitarian crisis, with parts of the coastal territory facing the threat of famine.

Earlier this week, the UN's child rights agency UNICEF said nine in 10 Palestinian children in Gaza were living in "severe child food poverty, surviving on diets comprising two or fewer food groups per day – one of the highest percentages ever recorded". By comparison, in 2020, only 13 percent of children in the Gaza Strip were living in severe child food poverty, UNICEF said.

'I used to love playing football'

The World Health Organization also said last week that more than four in five Palestinian children in Gaza “did not eat for a whole day at least once in the three days” ahead of a food insecurity survey. Defense for Children International-Palestine (DCIP) has also reported on the dire consequences Israel’s continued military assault on Gaza is having on Palestinian children, including thousands that have been critically injured since October. The collapse of Gaza’s healthcare system has meant many patients, including children, are unable to get the care they require, the group said.

“Palestinian children who survive Israeli attacks face a lifetime of recovery to heal from the physical and psychological trauma,” Ayed Abu Eqtaish, DCIP’s accountability programme director, said in a statement on Wednesday. In one testimonial gathered by DCIP, a 15-year-old Palestinian boy named Mohammad described his difficult journey to recovery after he was shot in the back by an Israeli quadcopter in March. He is now paralysed in the lower part of his body.

“I spend most of my time on a mattress, lying on my back. Also, I suffer from ulcers due to prolonged sitting, and have not healed yet. The medicine for these wounds and painkillers are expensive and my father cannot always afford them,” Mohammad told DCIP. “I used to love playing football, as I always stood as a goalkeeper,” he said. “I also loved repairing watches and electrical appliances, but now I cannot do that due to my disability.”

In January, Save the Children said more than 10 children in Gaza lose limbs daily. But Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz slammed the UN’s decision on Friday, calling it “shameful”. “The [Israeli military] is the most moral army in the world – and no fictitious report will change that. This step will have consequences for Israel’s relations with the UN,” Katz said in a social media post.