

NGO says Palestinian children abused in Israeli detention



London, July 10 (RHC)-- Palestinian minors arrested by Israeli forces face immense emotional and physical abuse, according to the rights group Save the Children, which has revealed the tragedy minors go through as detainees in a new report.

In the report published on Monday, the group said some of the former child detainees it spoke to reported violence of a sexual nature, while many others were beaten, handcuffed and blindfolded in small cages in detention centres and upon being moved between centres.

Jason Lee, Save the Children's country director in the occupied Palestinian territory, said Palestinian children are the only ones in the world to experience systematic prosecution in military courts. There is a marked increase in the number of former child detainees who suffer nightmares and insomnia and have difficulty returning to their normal life, with many reporting a decrease in hope for their futures.

The study said 86 percent of the 228 former child detainees surveyed were beaten in detention, and 69 percent were strip-searched, adding that 42 percent were injured at the point of arrest, including gunshot wounds and broken bones. They were also interrogated at unknown locations without the presence of a guardian or caregiver and are often deprived of food, water and sleep, the report says.

In addition, they were often refused access to legal counsel, according to the research.

Save the Children said the former child detainees surveyed were from across the occupied West Bank and had been detained for one month to 18 months. The report says: "The main alleged crime for these detentions is stone-throwing, which can carry a 20-year sentence in prison for Palestinian children."

The new research comes as the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 presents evidence on Monday to the Human Rights Council on Palestinian children in detention.

Osama Arabi, a former detainee who is now 44 years old, said he was strip-searched when he was arrested as a minor. "I did not understand what they were searching for. They didn't say. It was humiliating; it made me very angry," Osama, who was arrested as a 14-year-old, told Al Jazeera.

Save the Children said these practices are a serious and longstanding human rights concern and called for the government of Israel to end the detention of Palestinian children under military law and their prosecution in military courts.

Khalil, who was arrested when he was 13, said he did not receive essential healthcare. Save the Children quoted him as saying: "I had an injury on my leg. I had a cast and had to crawl to be able to move. I felt my body being torn apart. I had no cane to help me walk, I kept asking soldiers for help during the transfer, but no one helped me."

Country director Lee said: "Our research shows – once again – that they [Palestinian children] are subject to serious and widespread abuse at the hands of those who are meant to be looking after them."

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