



OSRSG/080303**PRESS RELEASE****The Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict condemns the recent escalation of violence in the Gaza strip and southern Israel**

New York, 3 March 2008 - Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict expresses her profound concern about the upsurge in violence in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel.

She denounced the use of disproportionate force by the Israeli Defense Force, which resulted in the killing and injuring of many civilians, especially children. At least 17 children have been killed and more than 200 others injured since last week. All schools operated by UNRWA in Gaza were forced to close and a main office of the Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS) was severely damaged: this incident resulted in the death of a five-month-old baby.

Ms. Coomaraswamy also condemned the Palestinian rocket attacks against Israeli civilians, which continue to destabilize the area.

"I am profoundly disappointed to see that once again children and their families are becoming targets for military activities, – Ms. Coomaraswamy said –the need for security must not ignore humanitarian concerns. We must clearly distinguish between civilians and combatants."

Earlier this morning, several hundred school children from 20 schools took part in a Hezbollah-organized demonstration outside UN headquarters in Beirut. The Special Representative voiced her concern for the participation of children in political activities, which can expose them to further violence and insecurity.

In April 2007, the Special Representative visited the region in order to work with all sides of the conflict on ensuring special protection for children.

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