
Palestinian children deprived of basic rights to education

WEST BANK, 15 September 2010 - The Minister of Education and Higher Education, UNICEF, and the United Nations relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) warn that educational standards have plummeted to an unacceptable level, despite the efforts of the Palestinian Authority and the support of the international community.

Today, as over a million children return to school in the oPt, an unacceptable number of them are facing long and precarious journeys to schools ill-equipped to receive them. In Gaza, more than a year after 'Cast Lead', 82 per cent of the damage to schools have still not been repaired, compounding the already stressed education system, where vast majority of schools have been teaching on a double-shift system. In East Jerusalem, there is lack of more than 1,000 classrooms, putting children at risk of not attending school at all.

"The international community should take a collective stand and support the education system, especially in the most vulnerable areas such as Gaza and Area C", said Lamis Alami, Minister of Education and Higher Education.

In Area C, at present, students face many obstacles, including restricted access to their schools, long walking distances, and substandard classrooms due to a restrictive permit regime.

"Children must have safe and unrestricted access to education, and schools themselves must provide a decent and appropriate environment for learning", said Jean Gough, UNICEF-oPt Special Representative. "Every child has the right to learn and grow in an environment where their health and safety are paramount", she added.

Today, over 10,000 children start their school year in tents, caravans, or tin shacks throughout Area C, and at least one third of government schools in these areas have poor and inadequate water and sanitation facilities. These classrooms fall far short of basic safety and hygiene standards. Even established schools face a crisis in water supplies for the children, and totally inadequate sanitary facilities.

Constant pressure and harassment by settlers and Israeli military forces experienced by so many school children, as well as forced displacements and house demolitions, result in psychological distress. "We are deeply concerned that many children will suffer from devastating long-term consequences and lost educational chances", added Alami.

We collectively call on the Israeli Government to ensure safe and unrestricted access to education, which is an obligation of all governments proclaimed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We also demand the Israeli Authorities to immediately refrain from demolishing schools, and issuing demolition orders. Facilitating unhindered humanitarian work, aimed at rehabilitation and expansion of schools, is a necessary first step to protect children's rights to education in the West Bank and Gaza.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org

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