



ONE DAY IN PRISON – FEELS LIKE A YEAR

Palestinian children tell their own stories



Save the Children

Sweden

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Palestinian children tell their own stories

Text and Photographs:

Mia Gröndahl

*Save the Children Sweden fights for children's rights.
We deliver immediate and lasting improvements
to children's lives worldwide.*

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Foreword

Save the Children Sweden works to promote and protect the rights of children in Sweden and abroad. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation for all our work. The Convention formulates children's right to express their opinion on all matters that concern them. One of Save the Children's most important objectives is to make children's voices heard.

On commission from Save the Children, in summer 2003 the journalist and photographer Mia Gröndahl carried out a number of interviews with young Palestinians from the West Bank, all of whom were aged under eighteen. In this report, these children talk in their own words about the serious violations of their rights to which they have been subjected in Israeli prisons and military detention camps, and about how they view the future.

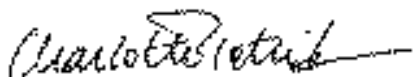
The Convention contains protective provisions which refer to the deprivation of liberty, prohibit torture or any other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, and lay down children's right to special protection throughout the whole of the legal process. These protective standard rules are to be observed with regard to all children under eighteen years of age – yet they are not observed by the Israeli authorities with regard to Palestinian children and young people; instead, special military laws apply which, for example, make it possible to imprison children from as young as twelve years.

Since autumn 2000, when the Second Intifada began, the situation for Palestinian children in Gaza and the West Bank has deteriorated dramatically. Children's right to protection, education and health, to survival and development, is being violated on a daily basis. In a report from Save the Children Sweden and Save the Children UK, published in April 2003 and entitled "Growing Up Under Curfew – Safeguarding the basic rights of Palestinian children", 380 Palestinian children talk about their situation. The picture the children paint is very worrying; constant curfews, military closures and the Israeli military presence mean that many children are unable or do not dare to go to school, meet their friends or go outside to play. The ensuing isolation leads to children becoming apathetic and depressed.

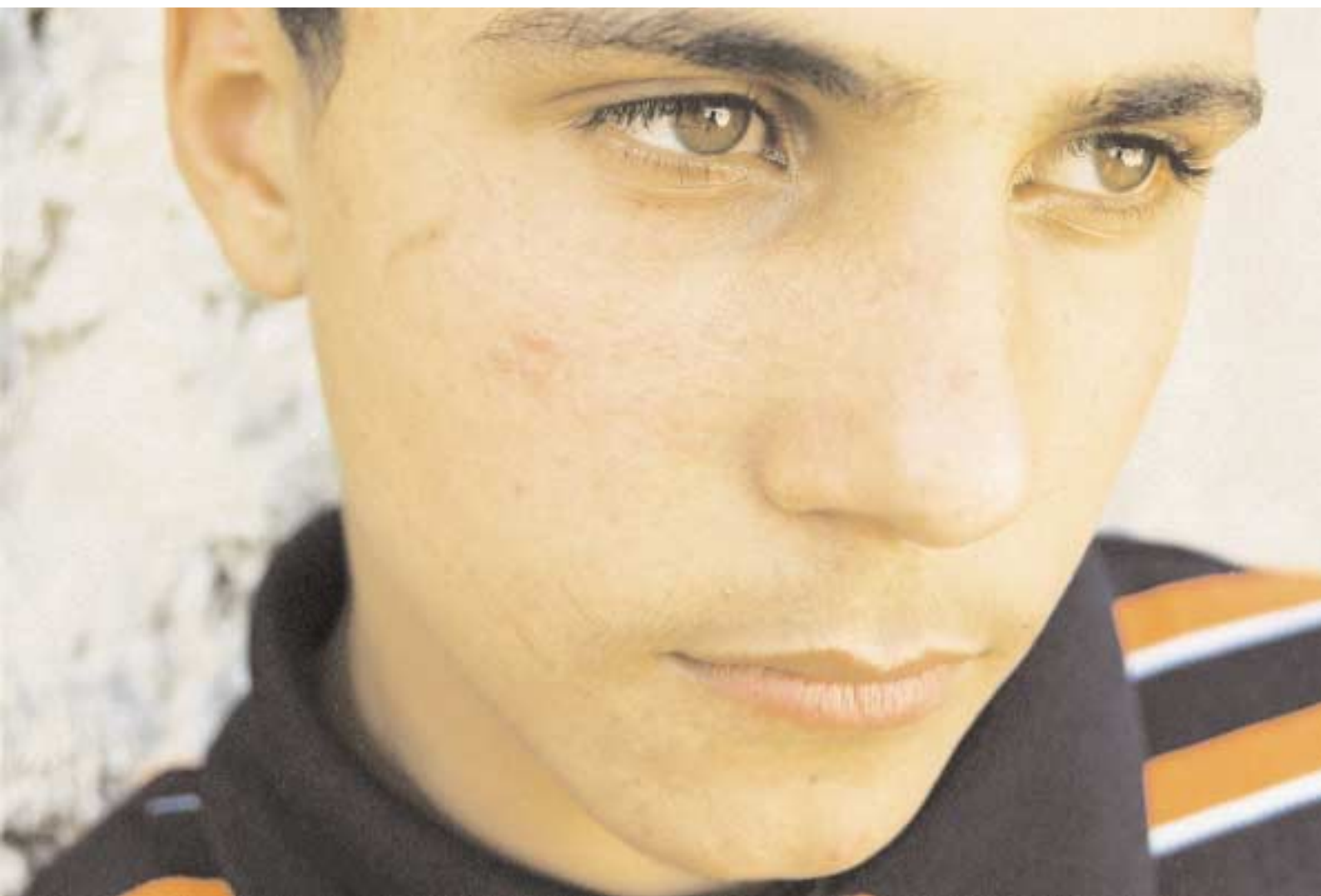
With this report, Save the Children Sweden aims to give Palestinian young people the opportunity to describe in their own words the reality in which they live; at the same time we also want to make a contribution to changing the circumstances of these young people and do what we can to ensure that their rights are respected, and for this reason the report's conclusion addresses a number of demands to politicians and decision-makers, and to the Israeli government.

Save the Children Sweden would especially like to thank Defence for Children International – Palestine Section for making the writing of this report possible.

Stockholm, 29 September 2003



Charlotte Petri Gornitzka
Secretary General



– People spat in my face, says Odeh.
They kicked me and shouted at me.
But I couldn't see them, because I was
still blindfolded.

Odeh Abu Za'anonah, aged 15

Sometimes one day in prison felt like a year.
But after ten days you get used to it and
don't cry as much.

Odeh sits in a corner of the sofa, holding a little cushion in his arms. He has recently turned fifteen, but he looks younger; he still has a child's round cheeks and chubby fingers. Throughout the whole of our conversation Odeh squeezes the soft cushion with his restless hands. He complains that he has stomach-ache and headache almost every day, and is sometimes not up to going to school. The pains started when he returned to Hebron and tried to start living his normal life again, the life that was brusquely interrupted when he was arrested by the Israeli army one afternoon early last spring.

– Me and my friends were out throwing stones at the soldiers, Odeh tells me. Every time they come with their green army Jeeps and put up road blocks to prevent people round here from going where they want, we've tried to stop them.

Hebron is home to 120,000 people. Right in the heart of this old Palestinian town, a little colony of about 500 Israeli settlers has established itself. Their demand for safety means that a large Israeli military presence has become a constant feature in the town, and this presence became even more palpable when the Second Intifada started in September 2000. In that same autumn Odeh threw his first stone at the soldiers and their Jeeps. He was twelve years old.

– I almost got caught the very first time, says Odeh. A soldier got hold of me, but he pulled my jacket off and I got away.

Odeh shows me the size of stones he used to throw. I am surprised at how small they are, so small that he can hold four or five of them in his hand at the same time. During the hours before he was caught, in the spring of 2003, he had managed to hit two soldiers with his stones, one on the elbow and one right in the forehead. Neither of the soldiers was injured – but they had caught sight of the young stone-thrower on the other side of the crossroads, and a wild chase began. Four heavily armed soldiers ran after the fourteen-year-old.

– Suddenly I saw two more soldiers coming straight at me from the other direction. I tried to get away by climbing over a wall, but the two soldiers got there and grabbed my legs just as I was about to pull myself over. There was an iron door in the wall, and one of the soldiers threw me as hard as he could against

it, and then banged my head several times against the hard iron. The other soldier was shouting and screaming, and was jamming the barrel of his M-16 machine gun into my back, again and again, as hard as he could. The wounds they gave me were so deep that you can still see the scars on my chest and back.

This violent arrest was the prelude to a prolonged period of assault that would come to last seventy days. The soldiers chained Odeh's hands and feet, tied a blindfold round his eyes, and led him to the Israeli settlement in the middle of Hebron. On the way there, one of the soldiers amused himself by continually tripping him up, so that he kept stumbling over the chains around his ankles and falling over. It was a chilly day in February – but the soldiers left Odeh standing in the cold, still bound hand and foot, outside the settlement's police station. There he was an easy target for the aggression of the Israeli settlers.

– People spat in my face, says Odeh. They kicked me and shouted at me. But I couldn't see them, because I was still blindfolded.

After three humiliating hours, Odeh was taken in an army Jeep to the larger settlement of Kiryat Arba, a few kilometres east of Hebron. Odeh asked if he could phone home, but was not allowed to. "When you've owned up to your crimes, then you can phone home", one of the soldiers told him. Before he was interrogated, Odeh was examined by a military doctor. It was a standard check of Odeh's heart, lungs and blood pressure. The fact that the boy's body was covered in cuts and swollen bruises was something the doctor chose to ignore; instead, he grabbed Odeh round the throat and asked him if he came from Arroub, the refugee camp situated on the road between Hebron and Bethlehem.

– The doctor threatened me and said I'd be beaten up even more if I was from Arroub, Odeh recounts. I asked him, 'Why do you want to hit me?', and his answer was that the boys in Arroub always threw stones at his car when he drove past there.

After the medical examination Odeh was sent back to the soldiers. By now it was late in the evening, but instead of being given some well-needed rest the exhausted fourteen-year-old was now subjected to an interrogation which lasted all through the night. To start with, Odeh was thrust into the police station toilet. The soldiers punched and kicked him all over, telling him to confess, but Odeh refused to own up to anything.

– Then one of the soldiers got hold of a piece of heavy electric cable and started hitting me with it, Odeh tells me, and as he speaks he kneads the cushion hard between his hands. He aimed at my elbows, my knees, all the joints of my body. It hurt like mad when that rubber-covered iron rod made contact, and it's still blue round my knees. But I didn't own up to anything. Then the soldier got me by the scruff of the neck and pushed my head down into the toilet. It was full of poo and pee, and he kept pushing my head down into that revolting mess till I couldn't take any more and shouted out, "Stop, stop! I'll own up."

However, Odeh did not break his silence, and the assault resumed. After a while the soldiers changed their tactics, and now Odeh was offered coffee and a cigarette, which he declined. Shortly afterwards a soldier came into the room carrying a bundle of photographs taken earlier that day. The military camera had caught Odeh on film throwing stones, and in one of the pictures he could see himself holding a Molotov cocktail. Faced with this photographic evidence Odeh decided to confess to having thrown five stones; he had got rid of the Molotov cocktail while trying to escape his pursuers.

– They gave me a paper which they wanted me to sign my name on, says Odeh. One of the soldiers said it was my confession, but it was written in Hebrew and I can't read Hebrew, so I refused to sign it. They started hitting me again, and I had a feeling they weren't done with me, that they wanted something more from me. The soldiers tried to get me to grass on my mates, they wanted me to name the other guys in the photos, but I didn't, I said I didn't know them, because they came from a different part of town. In the end they threatened to shoot me. I don't know if they really would have dared to kill me, but I was scared, and I signed the confession.

This was not enough to satisfy the soldiers; before Odeh was to be sent on to the detention centre in Gush Etzion, a settlement outside Bethlehem, they wanted to give him one last punishment. Still without having had the chance to talk to his parents or a lawyer, Odeh was locked in a solitary confinement cell where he was subjected to torture in the form of being tied sitting to a small stool for three days – blindfolded and with chains round his hands and feet.

– I had to sit on the stool round the clock. I was only allowed to stand up when I needed to go to the toilet. And when I tried to stand it felt as if I didn't have any legs, I'd lost all feeling from the waist down.

When he reached Gush Etzion Detention Centre Odeh was put in a cell together with four other boys under eighteen. Etzion is one of twenty or so detention centres established by Israel for keeping Palestinians suspected of crimes against the country's security in "administrative detention" until their cases are brought up before the military court. Conditions at Etzion are notoriously bad: the Israeli human rights organisation B'tselem, in a report published in 2002, detailed the regular torture to which inmates of the centre are subjected, even those who are aged under eighteen. The centre is often so full that the inmates are forced to pack themselves together, and sleep on thin, dirty mattresses laid directly on the cement floor. No-one may leave their cell apart from to go to the toilet. Inmates are forced to neglect their personal hygiene – they are allowed to shower once a week, for five minutes in cold water. They have no access to television, radio or books – which for example means that it is impossible for the inmates to continue their education while interned. Children are usually moved on to other detention centres, but Odeh was kept at Etzion for the whole of the time he was imprisoned.

– There were a lot of us at Etzion who were under fifteen, Odeh remembers. The older prisoners were so angry that we weren't moved that they went on hunger strike for us. But it didn't help.

None of them were allowed visits from their parents; their only link with their parents was via their lawyer. Whenever Odeh asked if he could use a phone to ring home, the answer was no. Odeh had been chosen by his four cell-mates as the one who would look after contacts with the prison guard. Every cell was obliged to use the same system: the spokesman was the only one allowed to address the prison guard, for the other inmates the rule was that when the guard came, they had to quickly turn to face the wall with their hands behind their backs. Anyone who broke this rule, or who in any other way annoyed the guard, was severely punished. The guard did not like it when Odeh tried to negotiate improvements for himself and his cell-mates; Odeh was often beaten, and was tortured on a number of occasions.

– When they didn't let us phone home I stopped eating, says Odeh. After a couple of days of hunger striking we were allowed to use the telephone, but at the same time I was punished for having refused to eat. They blindfolded me and made me stand in the 'shabeh' position for almost twelve hours, from eleven at night until ten in the morning. When you've stood with your arms and legs stretched out for that long, it hurts as soon as you try to move a limb.

Odeh and his young cell-mates tried to help each other keep their spirits up. Most fourteen-year-old Palestinian children have hardly ever been away from home or separated from their family. These young prisoners miss their families enormously. Since being arrested Odeh had only come into contact with adults who treated him badly, who hit him, kicked him, shouted at him, frightened him, who threatened, humiliated and wounded him in every imaginable way. The other boys sharing his cell had all been subjected to the same kinds of treatment. None of them were able or felt they needed to keep up appearances in front of the others – tears were often shed in the cell.

– I missed my Mum, says Odeh. When I was finally allowed to talk to her, after the hunger strike, I could hardly say anything, the words stuck in my throat. I just cried. But the five of us in the cell tried to comfort each other all the time. If one of us was crying and feeling down one day, the rest of us would say "Come on, chin up, it'll soon be all over. It won't be long before you're back home again."

After nearly two months at the Etzion camp, Odeh's case was to be decided in court. His parents, who he hadn't seen since first being arrested, were waiting in the courtroom. On the way to the courthouse Odeh was assaulted by the soldiers in the Jeep, where no-one could see them. Odeh, who was blindfolded as well as bound hand and foot, was forced to squeeze in under a folding seat in the Jeep. He felt someone pouring cold water on his back, and then the seat was used to club him – it was repeatedly smashed into his forehead, which split open and started bleeding.



– I was still bleeding when I came into the courtroom, Odeh relates. My Mum started crying when she saw me, and then I couldn't hold my tears back either. I told the lawyer what had happened in the Jeep. But the court didn't care, all that happened was that the soldiers were told it would be enough if I had my hands and feet tied on the way back to Etzion, they could leave the blindfold off, as if that made up for it somehow. There were a few of us in the Jeep on the way back to Etzion. Instead of letting us go straight back indoors they made us wait out in the cold. We had to stand there until one of us fainted.

Odeh's confession was read out in court. His lawyer asked the court to take into account his young age, and the fact that the case concerned five small stones and possession of a Molotov. One of the three judges called for a sentence of eighteen months' imprisonment. The sentence finally given was eight months. However, ten days later Odeh was set free, because there was not any room for him in the over-filled prisons. Odeh has now been back at home with his family for a few months, but his mother, Kawkab, is worried about him. He is not the same boy as before he was arrested and imprisoned; her son has pain in his body, and is restless and edgy. Odeh has promised his mother that he will not throw stones again – if he gets caught again the minimum sentence is five years' imprisonment. Kawkab does not feel she can trust him, however, and every time the Israeli army with its Jeeps enters their district, she locks him in.



Sawsan, aged sixteen

–The questions just kept coming at me from three corners of the room, and made me feel like my head was spinning. But the fourth man didn't say anything, his job was to hit me. If I didn't have time to look at the one who was asking a question, he hit me straight away with the piece of cable. It hurt like anything. Afterwards they forced me to sign a paper saying that I hadn't been beaten during questioning.

Sawsan Abu Turki, aged sixteen

Things happened in prison that I can't tell my Mum about. I feel I can't tell anybody about them.

We are sitting in the living room in the Abu Turki family's home, in Hebron. Sawsan, who is sixteen, and Fatma, her mother, are sitting on one of the mattresses which are arranged along three of the room's green walls. Both mother and daughter are wearing a veil – but that is where the similarity ends. Fatma Abu Turki has given birth to seven children, and seldom leaves the house. She is still living in a kind of state of shock over everything that has happened in the last three years, and she complains about how her oldest daughter has been robbed of her childhood, how her whole life has been ruined. Sawsan asks her mother to be quiet. "I can speak for myself", she says, in a tone that tells us that this is a girl who has taken charge of her own life.

Sawsan Abu Turki has spent all her childhood in the shadow of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Since the mid-1970s, when Israeli settlers occupied the first house in central Hebron, the town and its inhabitants have not had many periods of peace. Many Palestinians placed their hope in the peace process which was set in motion in 1993. Sometimes Sawsan and her friends played with the settlers' children, if both groups happened to find themselves in the same street. They also used to say hello to each other when Sawsan was on her way to and from the Ibrahimi mosque, which also serves as a Jewish place of worship. In the manner of children, their curiosity was greater than the hatred of the adults around them. One summer Sawsan took part in a summer camp that was organised for both Palestinian and Israeli children.

– I can still remember a song in Hebrew, says Sawsan. At first we argued with each other quite a lot, we teased each other and called each other names. But there was a boy there who I liked. I can't remember his name, but it sounded Arabic, and he could speak a bit of Arabic as well. He was nice. He had brown eyes.

In September 2000 the peace process collapsed. Sawsan was thirteen at the time. That autumn she was attacked by a group of settlers, at the old market in Hebron. A nine-year-old cousin was an eye-witness as the settlers set their dogs on everybody around them and started hitting everyone and everything that came in their way. The cousin took fright and ran to Sawsan's parents' house to tell them what had happened. Her parents went out to look for their daughter and found her nine hours later, in one of the town's hospitals, covered in bruises and with severe concussion.

– I'll never be completely back to normal again, says Sawsan, but does anybody care? Who would be able to help me? The settlers have the soldiers and Israeli law on their side, no-one listens to a Palestinian girl. I felt utterly humiliated, it was as if we Palestinians are worth nothing at all.



– My daughter is a very proud person, Fatma adds at this point. She has never allowed anyone to push her around. Even when she was little, she always gave as good as she got if she felt anyone had been mean to her.

Sawsan could not get the sense of humiliation, of having been trampled on, out of her thoughts. She had always been a cheerful and outgoing person, but now she started to be withdrawn and avoid contact with other people. Apart from when she went to the hospital for the regular treatment she was receiving for the injuries sustained when she was assaulted, she preferred to stay at home. She often found herself thinking about the settlers and the soldiers, about how she wanted to get her revenge. A year after the assault, Sawsan took a kitchen knife, wrapped it in a cloth and hid it among her books in her school bag. On her way home from school she would be passing the Israeli road-block next to the settlement, and she was planning to use the knife there.

– But the soldiers started to get suspicious when I was still a couple of metres away from the road-block, says Sawsan. I had the knife hidden behind my back. Before I had time to get it out they started shooting at me. One soldier aimed at my head, and two others tried to shoot me in the legs. I ran away as fast as I could, with bullets flying all around me, and tried to find somewhere to hide in the alleys in the Old City.

The chase lasted for almost an hour. The three soldiers had called for reinforcements, and six army Jeeps full of heavily armed soldiers arrived and cordoned off the part

of town where Sawsan was desperately trying to find somewhere to hide. She managed to get someone to let her into a house, but a short while later the army stormed the building and arrested her. Out in the alley the press had come rushing; they had heard about the hunt for the fourteen-year-old schoolgirl.

– “One word to the journalists and you’re dead”, the man in charge of the soldiers threatened me, says Sawan, so I didn’t dare open my mouth as they led me out of the house.

It was a hot summer’s day, and Sawsan was arrested in the middle of the day, when the sun was at its highest in the sky. She was locked inside an army Jeep and driven to Kiryat Arba, the Israeli settlement situated just to the east of Hebron, where she was to be questioned. But first, she was made to stand outside in the sun for an hour, with chains around her hands and feet. Sawsan got sunstroke, and her nose started bleeding.

– I asked for a paper tissue, Sawsan recounts. But the soldier I asked, who was a young woman, refused to help me. I had to wipe the blood on my school uniform.

After being interrogated at the Kiryat Arba police station, Sawsan was taken that evening to the Abu Kabir prison, outside Tel Aviv. Several times during the afternoon she had asked if she could phone home; she knew how worried her parents must be, since they were used to her coming straight home from school. Sawsan was not however allowed to contact anyone. She felt very alone and vulnerable when she was led inside the walls of the big, dark prison. It was a frightening building. And the people waiting in the interrogation room were just as frightening.

– At first I could only hear their voices. None of them were talking normally, the whole room was full of shouting, says Sawsan. And when they took my blindfold off I found myself face to face with four musclemen. They didn’t look like normal people, they were big as houses. They had big swollen arms covered with tattoos. And it was them who were going to question me.

The men were from Shabak, the Israeli security service. Three of the men each took up position in one corner of the room. Sawsan was placed standing in the middle of the room, still with chains around her hands and feet. The fourth man stood close to Sawsan. In his hand he held a length of heavy electric cable. Before the interrogation began, Sawsan was ordered to look at the person who asked a question.

– The questions just kept coming at me from three corners of the room, and made me feel like my head was spinning. But the fourth man didn’t say anything, his job was to hit me. If I didn’t have time to look at the one who was asking a question, he hit me straight away with the piece of cable. It hurt like anything. Afterwards they forced me to sign a paper saying that I hadn’t been beaten during questioning.

Sawsan was interrogated over a period of twenty days at Abu Kabir. During that time she was kept in solitary confinement in a little, dark cell, the only light being what came in through an opening in the wall. There was nothing to do in the narrow cell. Most of the time Sawsan sat looking out through the opening, even though there was nothing to see except the grey walls of the prison. She thought a lot about her family, and how they would cope if she never returned home to them. And she thought about school, and her friends there, and about how she was falling further and further behind in her schoolwork with every day she spent in prison. But above all, she thought about how she mustn't give up, about how she had to cope with the loneliness and the rough methods of her interrogators who were not satisfied with Sawsan's claim that she had been acting on her own, but who every day repeated the same questions: "Which organisation do you belong to? Who sent you out with the knife? Give us their names!" The hardest thing to endure was the torture.

– It was like being crucified on an iron bed, says Sawsan. I tried to resist, but seven or eight guards pushed me down on my back onto a hard iron frame. They stretched out my arms and legs and chained them to the four corners of the bed. I had to lie there like that from the evening till the next morning. When you're lying in 'shabeh', as they call it, you can't sleep. Every time I tried to move, the grid scraped against my back and the hard iron chains dug into my wrists and ankles. If the guards notice that you can move even just a little bit, they pull the chains even tighter.

Finally, Sawsan was unable to take any more, and she went on hunger strike. When she had refused to eat for a whole week one of her interrogators came into her cell, and asked her what she thought she was doing. "Don't you realise that you'll die?" he said, and then gave her a thorough beating. After the long and difficult weeks of questioning at Abu Kabir, Sawsan was taken to the military court in Beit El. There she finally got to see her parents again.

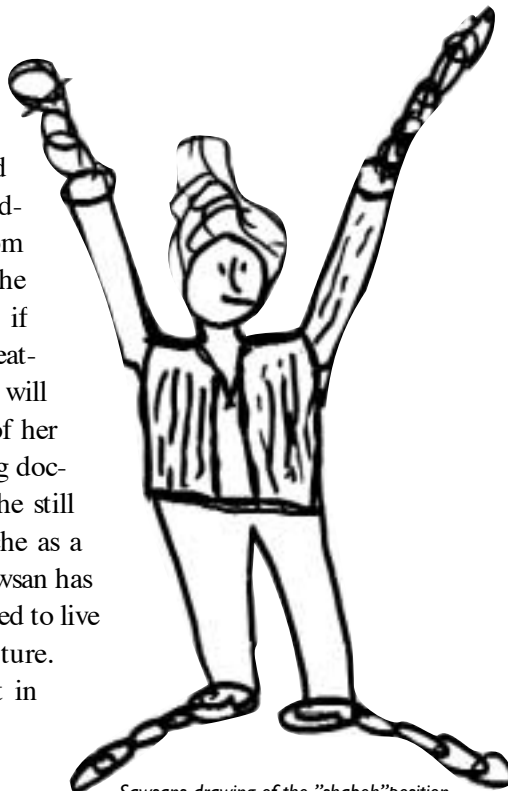
– It was terrible, says Fatma Abu Turki. We made the long journey from Hebron to Beit El at least twenty five times, thinking that her trial would be taking place, but every time we got there they gave us a new excuse: "The computers aren't working, so we can't hold any trials today", or "There aren't any female soldiers available today to escort your daughter here from Abu Kabir." Once, she had been transported to Beit El, I could see her in there in the courtyard, and I called out her name: Sawsan! When I did that, the soldiers hit her. When the trial was finally held I could see the marks round her hands. Her wrists had a kind of blue shine and were covered in ugly wounds. And her ankles were in bandages. That was the only time we saw Sawsan during the whole of the time she was kept prisoner, though we weren't allowed to talk to her, or touch her. We were only allowed to look at her.

The fourteen-year-old Sawsan was sentenced to four months' imprisonment; the three months she had already spent in prison were not taken off her sentence. Once she had received her verdict she was transferred to the women's prison in Ramle,

twenty or thirty miles outside Tel Aviv. There, Sawsan shared a cell with two other young Palestinian women, who came to be a great source of support during the rest of her internment. It was not possible for Sawsan to carry on any studies. When she asked for some school books she was given two, which she couldn't read since one of them was in Russian and the other in Hebrew. The prison guards seldom called Sawsan by name; instead they addressed her as "Vandal!", "Terrorist!" Moreover, the torture from Abu Kabir persisted, and now it was performed groupwise – it happened that all the girls in the cell were taken at the same time and chained to iron beds which stood in a row in a special torture chamber.

– Every time there had been a Palestinian attack against Israel they came to get us, explains Sawsan. They were using us as a reprisal. Fifteen guards wrestled us down onto the iron bedsteads and chained our hands and feet. Once I thought that one of the other girls had died during the night. She had been forced to lie in 'shabeh' so often that the chains had worn her skin away and dug right down to the bone in her arm. But she survived, she had just fainted. Another time, the girl next to me started screaming – she'd seen that my arms had turned completely blue. I'd lost all feeling in them and had no idea what was happening. The guards got nervous and tried to unchain me quickly, and when they couldn't do it they started tugging so hard at the chains around my wrists and ankles that they just made the wounds even deeper.

Sawsan still suffers from the injuries caused by being tortured, and one of her ankles is still heavily bandaged. When she was released from prison she was operated on, but the operation was not a success and if Sawsan is not given specialist treatment there is a serious risk that she will be disabled for life. A large part of her spare time is taken up with visiting doctors; as well as her new injuries she still suffers from headache and backache as a result of the settlers' attack. But Sawsan has not given up hope. She is determined to live a full and dignified life in the future. And, she says, the time she spent in prison was not only bad.



Sawsan's drawing of the "shabeh" position.

– I learnt a lot from the girls I shared my cell with, she continues. They told me about society and the rest of the world, things I didn't know about. Now I know what I want to do with my life: I'm going to keep studying, and I'm going to be a journalist.

Serious Violations of the Rights of Palestinian Children

Palestinian children who are arrested by the Israeli army are often subjected to methods of interrogation which involve cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment which can be seen as equivalent to torture. Many children have also told how they have been deliberately mistreated while in prison. One method which is used in Israeli prisons is what is known as the “shabeh position”, whereby the child’s arms and legs are stretched out, in a cross shape (sometimes both arms are stretched up on the same side of the body). The limbs are held in place by chains around the hands and feet, which cut deeply into the victim’s wrists and ankles. Sawsan Abu Turki, aged fifteen, has drawn an illustration which shows how she was chained in the “shabeh” position onto an iron bedstead. Every time she tried to move the metal cut into her back. This treatment has left Sawsan injured for life, both physically and mentally.

Israel has ratified, and undertaken to observe, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 37 of the Convention enshrines children’s right to protection from torture and capital punishment, and from unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. This is Article 37:

States Parties shall ensure that:

- (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age;*
- (b) No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;*
- (c) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child’s best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances;*
- (d) Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.*



Sawsans shows here drawing from the prison.



Other Central Articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

Article 1	Definition of a “child”
Article 2	Non-discrimination
Article 3	The best interests of the child
Article 6	The right to life, survival and development
Article 12	The right to be heard
Article 24	The right to health and medical care
Article 28	The right to education
Article 40	Administration of juvenile justice (criminal proceedings and correctional treatment)

Important International Conventions

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989);

The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), Articles 1 and 16;

The Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War (1949), Articles 27, 31, 32, 49 and 76.



– I cried like a little child, says Ali. I cried my eyes out. And I could see my Mum sitting there crying, too, in her place in the courtroom. But we weren't allowed to talk to each other. We weren't allowed to say even one little word to each other.

Ali Hamida, aged 17:

I've never been so scared. The soldiers didn't seem able to hold themselves back at all. I was sure I was going to die that night.

It was half past midnight on 11 July, 2001, when the Israeli army stormed the Hamida family's house. The whole village was woken up. Powerful search-lights, mounted on the roofs of the military Jeeps, cut through the darkness and fixed their beams on the two-storey house. Instead of knocking calmly on the door, a hundred or so masked and heavily armed men broke in through all the other openings in the building: windows, French windows and the unlocked sheet-metal door up on the roof where the women of the house hang their washing. Ali Hamida, who had turned fifteen that summer, was on the ground floor with his grandparents. Upstairs, Ali's father, Muhammed, was ordered to show his ID card and give the names of all his eight children. When the leader of the detachment heard the name of his second-youngest child, Ali Hamida, he said: "It's him we're after. Where is he?"

– I didn't get it at all, says Ali. I tried to remember if there was something I might have done ages ago, but I couldn't think of anything.

Ali was handcuffed and led out to one of the army Jeeps. His mother Hyyam, who had previously seen her oldest son taken away in a similar fashion, was beside herself with worry and wondered where they were going to take Ali. "We're only taking him to Ma'ale Adummin. He'll be back home in quarter of an hour", the masked leader told her. Ma'ale Adummin is the Israeli settlement which is nearest the village of Azzariyyeh. Ali was only wearing a pair of shorts and a t-shirt; before he was taken out of the house he asked if he could put some more clothes on, but he was not allowed. On the way out to the Jeep he asked again: "What have I done? What do you want with me?" The only answer he was given was that he would find out when they reached Ma'ale Adummin. Ali felt fear welling up inside him, but there was nothing he could do. The back doors of the Jeep closed behind him. There, inside the cramped and sound-proofed Jeep, the worst night Ali had ever experienced in his young life began.

– Five soldiers threw themselves over me when they'd got me in the Jeep, Ali recounts. Someone pulled up my t-shirt and dragged it up over my head, so that I couldn't see anything. I could only hear. Whilst they hit and kicked me, they swore at me and shouted insults in Hebrew. I recognised some of the words. They called my Mum and my sisters whores. One of the soldiers seemed to be really on edge. I could tell from his voice, he was breathing hard, it was

like he was working himself up to do something really violent. I've never been so scared in all my life, I was sure he was going to kill me.



The assault was committed while the Jeep was still parked in the middle of the village, outside Ali's home – but the fifteen-year-old knew that there was no point in crying out for help: no-one would hear him through the sound-proofed armoured sides of the vehicle. And even if anyone had heard him, what would they have been able to do? Ali was completely at the soldiers' mercy. After a while the Jeep drove off, and there was a reprieve in the assault. When they reached the settlement, two of the soldiers led Ali up a flight of stairs. He still had his t-shirt pulled up over his head and could not see where he was putting his feet. Every time he tripped over a stair, the soldiers laughed in derision. Ali was shoved into a room, where his interrogator was waiting for him.

– “Why do you throw stones?” he shouted at me as soon as I was inside the room, relates Ali. Then he tried to scare me by shouting: “Where are the batons? Have we got electricity in here? Have the dogs arrived?” The next second he

threw himself at me, it felt as if his fists and the hard boots he was kicking me with were all over my body. And all the time he was shouting and swearing and calling me all kinds of disgusting things, and yelling: “Why do you throw stones, you dirty bastard!”

I thought he would break every bone in my body. I couldn’t take any more of the beating, and shouted out, “Stop it, please!” But he just kept hitting and kicking me, and threatened to kill all my family if I didn’t confess. That made me even more scared than I was before, and I said: “OK, I’ll confess”.

It was not until this point that Ali was allowed to pull his t-shirt down from his head, and could see where he was. It was a small room with no windows. On one of the walls there was a map of the settlement. The interrogator had sat down behind a desk. There was one other soldier in the room; he was standing behind Ali and watching his every move. Both of the men were dressed in civilian clothes, and both were armed. The interrogator’s pistol was lying in full view on the desk. He made notes on a sheet of paper as Ali reluctantly answered his questions.

– I haven’t a clue what he actually wrote down on that piece of paper, says Ali. He kept going on about me throwing stones, even though I denied it. And he wanted the names of the friends who were with me – which ones were throwing stones, and if any of them had also thrown Molotovs. I didn’t give him any names, but he made a lot of notes.

Whenever the interrogator did not like the way Ali answered a question, the threats against him and his family were repeated: “Watch your bloody step! Tell the truth, or else...” Finally, Ali was ordered to sign his name at the bottom of the paper, but Ali cannot read Hebrew, and refused to take the pen.

– Then the soldier forced the pen into my hand, says Ali. I was in handcuffs, but he forced both my hands down towards the paper while he held the pen pressed into my right fist and pushed and pulled it back and forwards along the line where I was supposed to sign. It looked ridiculous, it ended up with scribbles all over the paper. It didn’t look like my signature at all. But still the paper was held up in court as my confession.

By now it was three thirty am. Already handcuffed, Ali was now shackled around his ankles as well. The soldiers changed guards, and there was half an hour of calm. Then Ali was taken to a separate room where he had his fingerprints taken. When he asked for some paper to wipe the ink from his fingers, the new soldier gripped Ali’s hands and forced him to wipe his fingers on his clothes, leaving them smeared with ink. The same soldier pushed Ali into an adjacent room. In this room there was an electric immersion coil in a saucepan. The soldier lifted the coil out of the hot water, and asked: “Why do you go throwing stones?”

– I tried again to explain that I hadn’t been throwing stones, says Ali. But the soldier wouldn’t listen to me. He pressed the coil against my fingers. The elec-

tric shock was so painful that I staggered and fell to the floor. He dragged me to my feet and shoved me into a corner, and then started boxing me with his fists in my private parts. It was terrible, the pain was terrible. I was still in chains, so I couldn't do anything to protect myself. The pain was so bad that I fell onto the ground again, but the soldier kept on hitting me, for another twenty minutes or so. And the whole time all kinds of dirty words kept pouring out of his mouth.

Soon it was morning. Ali was told to rest – but in the same room there were five young soldiers, two women and three men, who were having a coffee break. Every time they noticed that Ali was starting to doze off on his chair they rapped on the door with a stick.

Ali was exhausted. He had spent more than five hours being assaulted at the Ma'ale Adummin police station. He still had no idea what was going to happen to him, and his mind was full of the thought that he would not get out of the settlement alive. The young soldiers laughed at him when they noticed how frightened their rapping on the door made him, and how he started every time they made loud noises. There was a window in this room, and Ali looked up at it from time to time. The window was dark. Was it never going to get light? He hoped that it was not long until dawn. If I can make it through to the morning, he thought to himself, then there's a chance I can get out of this alive.

A few hours later Ali was on his way in a military transport to the Beit El Detention Centre, which is an assembly camp for Palestinian prisoners, situated outside Ramallah. Ali was to spend forty-three days locked up here, while the military court dealt with his case. After one week he was allowed to meet Khaled Quzmar, the DCI lawyer. Through Khaled, Ali was able to maintain contact with his family, who were not allowed to visit him in prison. Ali was not even allowed to phone home; every time he asked if he could use a telephone he was refused. He would have to wait a month, until the first court hearing, to see his parents again. During that time, he thought constantly about his mother:

– I was so worried about her, says Ali. I remember what happened when my big brother was arrested a few years ago. Mum just went to pieces. She stopped eating, she didn't drink anything, and all the time she complained that she had bad pains in her chest. I was afraid the same thing would happen to her again.

Every morning when Ali woke up he thought about his mother, Hyyam. He is not the kind of boy who cries easily, he says; he tends to keep his feelings to himself, bottle them up deep inside. But when he saw his mother in the courtroom after a month of missing her and worrying about her, he could not control his feelings any longer.

– I cried like a little child, says Ali. I cried my eyes out. And I could see my Mum sitting there crying, too, in her place in the courtroom. But we weren't allowed to talk to each other. We weren't allowed to say even one little word to each other.

The military court charged Ali with having thrown thirty stones and witnessed his friends making Molotov cocktails. The charge was based on the confession Ali was forced to sign during his interrogation in the settlement of Ma'ale Adummin. After something like ten hearings, three of which Ali was not allowed to attend, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. The final length of the sentence was fixed following a series of discussions between the three judges; one of the Israeli judges felt that the sentence was too lenient – according to him, the fifteen-year-old Ali should have been sent to prison for five years. Ali was to serve his time at the Tel Mond prison, which is situated outside the town of Haifa in northern Israel. On the day when Ali was to leave the Beit El Detention Centre to be transported to Tel Mond, he and twenty or so other prisoners were the object of a nasty attack committed by a group of Israeli soldiers.

– The soldiers stormed in to our section wearing tear-gas masks, says Ali. One of the soldiers, he was a Druse, threw a canister of tear gas in among us. When the gas started to work panic broke out. I saw one guy who went mad; when he couldn't breathe he tore at his chest so hard he started to bleed. As for me, I tried to cover my face to keep the gas off. And all the time we were shouting: 'Let us out! Let us out! We need air!' But the soldiers just laughed behind their gas masks. We had to stay in there for fifteen minutes before they let us out. Afterwards, I heard that one of the guys in the cell next door had tried to hang himself in the window.

The two years inside the walls of Tel Mond went slowly. Throughout the whole of the time he was in prison, Ali was only allowed to see his parents twice; since the prison is in Israel it was very difficult for his parents, who live on the occupied West Bank, to obtain permission to travel there.

Ali was not permitted to make any telephone calls from the prison. He was not given any help to continue his studies. He also needed medical attention for the injuries he had sustained as a result of being assaulted at Ma'ale Adummin – among his injuries, one of his knees was giving him a lot of trouble. Ali finds it impossible to describe the health situation in the prison as anything other than “disgusting”.

– One boy had had his arm cut off, Ali continues. And there were a few young boys who'd been shot, and were still walking around with the bullets in their legs. Nobody got any decent treatment, the doctor's remedy for everything was Acamol, which is a kind of painkilling tablet. My knee still hurts today, I'm starting to worry that the swelling will never go down. And I've got problems with my hearing, I can't hear as well as I used to.

When Ali was released last spring, all his old schoolfriends were getting ready to graduate. It was hard for Ali, who would have liked to have graduated together with his friends. Starting to catch up in all the subjects, through studying by himself, feels almost impossible – although Ali says that he is going to give it a try. And, although he lost two years in prison, he does not feel that the time was completely wasted.



Palestinian youth are arrested.

– I learned to take responsibility, says Ali. We set up study groups in prison. Those of us who were older looked after the younger ones, and read the Koran together. I also got to know people I would never have met if I hadn't been sent to Tel Mond, good people who I'm glad I've met. Some days I can see it that way; other days, it feels like my whole life has been destroyed.

750 Palestinian children are arrested every year

Since the Palestinian uprising – the Intifada – in protest against Israel's occupation began three years ago, on 28 September 2000, the Israeli military forces have arrested and imprisoned over 2,000 Palestinian children. These children are aged between twelve and eighteen years, and a small proportion of them are girls. Under Israeli Military Orders, a Palestinian child in the West Bank and Gaza is considered as a minor only until the age of sixteen; the usual age of majority of eighteen, which is also that laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, applies to children who are citizens of Israel.

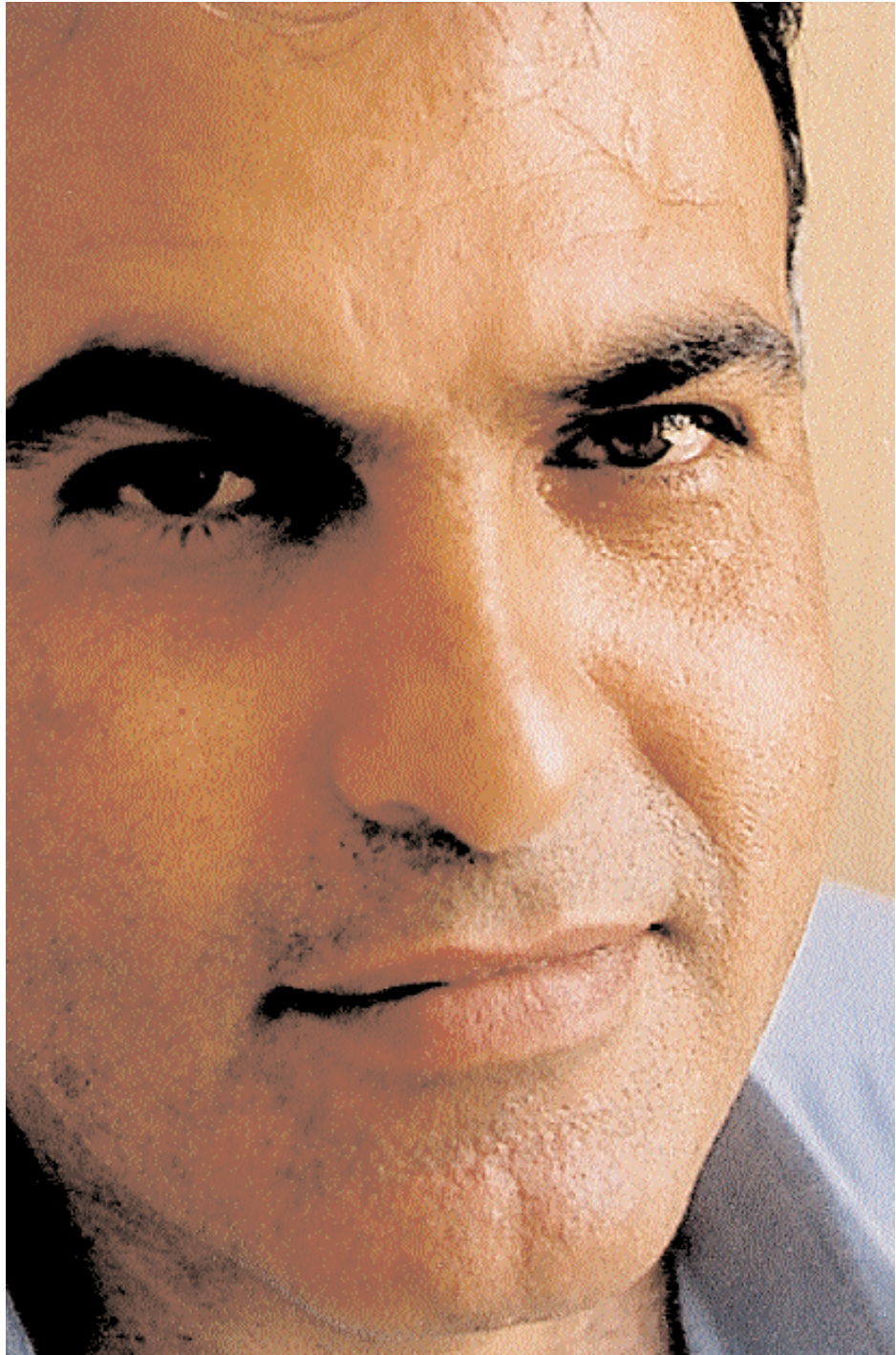
Over the first half of 2003 the Palestinian children's rights organisation DCI – Palestine (Defence for Children International – Palestine Section) has noted a dramatic increase in the number of children arrested. The children who are arrested are often accused of having thrown stones a year previously, or even longer ago than that. The arrested children come from all the larger Palestinian towns; a large number of the children are from Hebron, where a group of Israeli settlers have occupied the heart of the Old City. A pronounced increase has also been noted in the number of arrested children who are from the towns of Tulkarem/Qalqilyia, where Israel is building its separation wall between Israel and the West Bank.

At the time of writing, 350 Palestinian children are being kept prisoner in Israeli jails.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 40:

Article 40 Administration of juvenile justice (relevant passages):

- 1. States Parties recognize the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society.*
- 2. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of international instruments, States Parties shall, in particular, ensure that:*
 - (b) Every child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law has at least the following guarantees:*
 - (i) To be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law;*
 - (ii) To be informed promptly and directly of the charges against him or her, and, if appropriate, through his or her parents or legal guardians, and to have legal or other appropriate assistance in the preparation and presentation of his or her defence;*
 - (iii) To have the matter determined without delay by a competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body in a fair hearing according to law, in the presence of legal or other appropriate assistance and, unless it is considered not to be in the best interest of the child, in particular, taking into account his or her age or situation, his or her parents or legal guardians;*
 - (iv) Not to be compelled to give testimony or to confess guilt; to examine or have examined adverse witnesses and to obtain the participation and examination of witnesses on his or her behalf under conditions of equality.*



The Children's Lawyer, Khaled Quzmar:

The Children's Lawyer, Khaled Quzmar:

I feel for every child as if it was my own.

Sometimes the lawyer Khaled Quzmar wakes up in the middle of the night, his head full of thoughts of the Palestinian children who are in prison. It is not easy to go back to sleep.

Khaled is thirty-nine years old, and has four children of his own. He also says "my children" when talking about the vulnerable children who are forced to sleep in a cell, far away from their parents. Khaled started his work as a lawyer for the Palestinian section of DCI (Defence for Children International) in 1995; since then he has tried to help approximately 1,600 Palestinian children who have been arrested by the Israeli army.

Every year the soldiers arrest nearly 700 children, says Khaled when I met him in his office in Ramallah, on the West Bank, and that figure is rising all the time. The children are between the ages of twelve and eighteen. As you would expect, older children are in the majority, but the number of children who are under sixteen is growing all the time. When I visit the children who are locked up in the Israeli detention centres I often meet young boys who aren't even fifteen yet.

When the Palestinian uprising against Israel broke out in autumn 2000, it was borne to a large extent by the young generation who had no experience of living their life in peace. On the television and in the press we could see boys of all ages out on the streets throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. Israel then introduced Military Order No. 132, which gives the occupying forces full power to arrest and imprison Palestinian children aged between twelve and fourteen years.

– Sometimes the children don't look any older than my oldest daughter, who's ten, says Khaled. When I go to see them in prison they cry a lot, they feel alone and frightened. But Israel treats them like adult criminals, like they treat hardened offenders with drugs, robbery and manslaughter on their consciences.

Khaled has never had as many cases as he has this year. The pile of papers on his desk grows higher by the day. He has noticed to his surprise that many of the children who have been arrested in 2003 are charged with having thrown stones a year ago, sometimes even longer ago than that. The Israeli authorities take no account of the possibility that it might have been a one-off, that the child might never have touched a stone since. Every month roughly fifty new such cases are added to the pile on Khaled's desk.

– Why should a child be punished after the fact? wonders Khaled. I have a feeling that the military have drawn up a kind of 'waiting list' of children. I think

that, probably, the children who were arrested and questioned during the first year of the Intifada gave them a load of names of classmates and friends. When you're threatened, beaten and tortured you're ready to tell everything, including things that are not true. Those names were then registered by the military authorities, and made into a list which the soldiers are now going through and ticking off the names on.

When a child has been arrested it may be up to nineteen days before Khaled is given permission to meet his young client. Military Order No. 1500 gives the Israeli army, its soldiers and interrogators from Shabak, the security service, the right to detain children in solitary confinement for up to twelve days, with an extension of one week. This is a flagrant infringement of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and contravenes legislation in place in democratic countries aiming to protect human rights and liberties. There are two parallel judicial systems in Israel: a military judicial system which is applied with regard to the Palestinians on the occupied West Bank and in Gaza; and a civil judicial system for Israel's own citizens. According to Israel's civil legislation, an Israeli citizen under the age of majority may not be placed under arrest or questioned unless their parents, a social worker or a lawyer are present. Palestinian children are denied this protection of their rights.

– When I am finally allowed to see the child, he or she has been forced to confess, says Khaled. It is more the rule than an exception that the confession has been extracted by means of various kinds of threats, assault and torture. All the children I've represented have had the same experience: the soldiers say: 'All you have to do is own up, and write your name on this piece of paper, and then you can go home straight away.' But that isn't what happens; as soon as they've "confessed" they are sent away to a detention camp until their trial comes up. Of course, the military deny using these kinds of methods, but last year I represented a boy who demonstrated amazing presence of mind: when he was forced to sign his name at the bottom of a confession, he added in Arabic 'forced to sign'.

Nearly all Palestinian children who are arrested – 90% – are accused of having thrown stones. According to Military Order No. 53, the maximum sentence for this offence is ten years if the target was a soldier/settler, and twenty years if the stone was thrown at a car. In practice, the sentences given range from six months to five years in prison. The number of stones thrown is of decisive importance in determining the sentence. Under the stressful interrogation procedure the children often confess to having thrown what is clearly an utterly unreasonable quantity of stones.

– Sometimes a child is charged with throwing stones for example '600 times, twice a week for three years', says Khaled. When I find myself sitting with a confession like that in my hands, signed by the child, I can't draw any other conclusion than that the child has been tortured. What child would come up with that kind of figure by themselves?

– The other day one of the Israeli prosecutors told me that the sentences given to the

children are going to be made more severe, Khaled continues. 'Give them tougher sentences and they'll stop throwing stones', he said. Myself, I think exactly the opposite. These are not criminal children; what we're looking at is youngsters who see themselves as taking part in a struggle against an occupying power. If they're made to spend a longer period of time in prison, then they will come into contact with, and be taught a thing or two by, older and more experienced young people; and then it is not sure that all they will be throwing in the future is stones. But the prosecutors don't want to listen to me. All they're interested in is making the punishment as severe as possible.

Every year Khaled's cases have included ten to fifteen girls. This year, he is expecting double that figure. Palestinian girls do not go out throwing stones together with the boys; when a girl attacks the military her protest is often more planned and violent in its nature. The charges brought against girls involve stabbings of soldiers/settlers, or complicity in/preparation of suicide attacks. It is often the case that these Palestinian girls have experienced violence by soldiers or settlers, either against themselves or against members of their immediate family, and have therefore decided to seek revenge. Being under the age of majority and of the female sex are not mitigating circumstances in an Israeli military court.

– Huda, a fifteen-year-old girl, tried to stab a settler. The settler did not sustain any injuries, but Huda was sentenced to six years in prison, relates Khaled. On the same day as Huda's case was being dealt with by the military court, a settler who had killed an eleven-year-old Palestinian boy was being tried in the civil court. There was no doubt about his crime, a lot of people had witnessed his brutal attack on the boy, who was called Hilmi. The settler was sentenced to six months of community service.

The parents of girls who have been arrested are often very worried that their daughters might be made the victims of various kinds of sexual crime while they are being held for questioning and when they are in prison. Merely the rumour of having been violated in this way would, in itself, be able to destroy the rest of a girl's life once she is released. However, Khaled believes that the girls are spared abuse of this kind – although the same cannot be said with regard to boys.

– Most boys don't dare tell anyone if they've been subjected to sexual abuse, says Khaled. They are scared as anything that other people will find out, and this is something that the soldiers are very much aware of. I know of cases where children have agreed to become collaborators in return for the soldier not letting the people closest to the boy, on his housing estate or in the village where he lives, know that he has been raped.

There are occasions when Khaled has a feeling that his work as the children's lawyer is a hopeless task, when he doubts whether he is able to do any good at all. Although the children and their parents do not expect to be treated with justice by the military authorities in the occupied territories, nevertheless they place a great deal of hope in Khaled.



– I’m constantly feeling that I’m letting people down, says Khaled. And maybe it’s not as a lawyer that I am most useful, but rather as a kind of social worker: if I don’t give the children support when they’re in prison, and act as a link between them and their parents, then there’s nobody else who can do that. In the military court my hands are more or less completely tied; the only thing I can do during a trial is to try and negotiate a shorter sentence than the prosecutor is calling for – for example, to try to get one year in prison commuted to six months. I’ve never succeeded in getting anyone acquitted. It is quite simply never going to happen.

A Decade in Children's Service

The Palestinian Section of DCI (Defence for Children International) was formed in 1992. The organisation's headquarters are in Ramallah, and there are local representatives in several of the major towns in the West Bank and Gaza. Since its establishment, the organisation has worked to promote, protect and raise awareness of the rights of Palestinian children. The largest and most important part of DCI-Palestine's work consists of supporting and providing legal assistance to Palestinian children who are arrested and imprisoned by the Israeli military forces. At present, DCI-Palestine's lawyers represent two thirds of all Palestinian children who are arrested and put on trial in the Israeli military courts.

In addition to offering legal aid and expertise, DCI-Palestine investigates and analyses, on an ongoing basis, the situation and living conditions of Palestinian children in the difficult circumstances prevailing during the occupation. A further aspect of DCI-Palestine's work is advocacy and the influencing of public opinion; in this work the organisation addresses itself both to the international community, and to its own, local community where it aims to raise awareness of the importance of promoting and protecting children's rights. Save the Children Sweden has supported DCI-Palestine's work in the West Bank since 1997.

Conclusion

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Children on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are subjected, every day, to a denial of their right to live a life that is safe and secure and provides them with normal conditions in which to grow up. Military violence is a constant, ubiquitous feature of the environment in which they live. Curfews and military closures put their lives at risk and make it impossible for them to move about freely. Every day sees violations of their right to education, health care, play and recreation. In the Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank and Gaza there is no single location which could be said to provide a child-friendly, protected environment where it is possible to forget, just for a moment, about the violence and the ongoing Intifada. The children of Palestine live under severe psychosocial stress, and many of them are affected by serious symptoms which threaten their normal development. Children who are arrested and imprisoned by the Israeli army are an especially vulnerable and marginalised group. These children are in need of extra support measures if they are to be able to defend their rights. Those children who have been subjected to extreme violations of their rights need to be enabled to regain both their physical and their mental health, they need to regain their self-respect, and they need to be enabled to live again with their family, school and friends.

At the same time, it is important to work in a way that involves close dialogue with families and groups in the local community. The continuing joint work of SC-Sweden and DCI-Palestine is also to be directed towards the implementation of a stronger programme for psychosocial support and rehabilitation following release from prison; under this programme the young people will themselves be involved in influencing their own future.

Save the Children Sweden shares an office in Jerusalem with Save the Children UK. Save the Children works primarily with voluntary Palestinian organisations; one such organisation is Defence for Children International – Palestine Section, which seeks to help and support the kind of children this report deals with by means of advocacy at both the international and local levels, as well as by providing legal assistance and social support. Save the Children's collaborative partners are primarily to be found in the West Bank.

Save the Children UK and Save the Children Sweden have also, the last four years, worked together to present reports regarding the situation for Palestinian children and their rights to the UN High Commission for Human Rights in Geneva.

The serious violations of Palestinian children's rights need to be highlighted more by international aid donors, the UN, the EU, international and local human rights organisations, and also by the Palestinian Authority. Demands must be placed on the Israeli government to apply the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its special protection measures for Palestinian children in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Save the Children Sweden demands:

- That Israel respect and apply the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child with regard to the Palestinian children in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and that Israel fulfil its international obligations in accordance with international law;
- That Israel, with immediate effect, discontinue its unlawful treatment of those Palestinian children who are currently in Israeli detention centres and prisons, and that Israel give these children the legal protection and human treatment to which they are entitled under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- That more resources be made available to facilitate the provision of legal protection and psychosocial support to Palestinian children and young people in the risk zone;
- That governments and national and international actors should highlight the plight of arrested and imprisoned Palestinian children, and should demand that these children's rights be respected in accordance with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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