

**European Network of Ombudspersons for Children**

**Ad-hoc Position Statement on**

***“Children in Gaza must be protected at all costs and their rights restored.***

***An Urgent Call to Uphold International Law”***

**August 2025**

\* Endorsed electronically

**The European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC)** reiterates its deep concerns over the ongoing grave and unprecedented violations **of the rights of children in the Gaza Strip**. Conditions in Gaza have reached an unspeakable level of devastation with children paying the highest price. A severe famine is sweeping in the region and children are the primary victims.

As independent institutions with the explicit mandate to protect and promote the rights of children, **we call upon all national governments, the European Union, the United Nations, and relevant international bodies to take effective, coordinated and clear action to ensure immediate ceasefire and protect the lives of children in Gaza at all costs.**

**A Humanitarian and Child Rights Emergency**

After more than twenty-two months of conflict with continuous bombardment and a humanitarian blockade, the situation for children in Gaza has become unlivable. Gaza has been largely destroyed. Over 92% of the homes have been destroyed; schools, hospitals, playgrounds, and essential infrastructure have been badly damaged or demolished. More than 60,000 people, including tens of thousands of children<sup>1</sup>, have been killed. Children are wounded, separated from their family or orphaned, traumatised, displaced or permanently disabled. Basic survival resources – water, food, electricity, medical care – have been deliberately blocked. A growing number of children suffer from acute malnutrition, psychological trauma, and lack of access to medical care.

The continuous dramatic situation in Gaza, the inadequate response of the international community and failure to protect the most vulnerable, the children, seriously challenge the perception of human rights as a fundamental universal value.

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<sup>1</sup> According to UNICEF, more than 50,000 children have reportedly been killed or injured since October 2023.

The harm endured by children is in direct violation of their fundamental rights as guaranteed under international law, particularly the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC), ratified by nearly every country in the world.

The extent of the destruction, the targeting of civilian life, and the mass displacement of children and families have created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that demands immediate and strong international action. The lives, safety, and development of an entire generation of Palestinian children are compromised.

### Violations of Core Child Rights

The impact of this conflict represents a broad and deep breach of children's rights, including:

- **Article 6, the right to Life, Survival, and Development:** Ongoing hostilities have claimed thousands of children's lives and **threaten** the long-term development of many more.
- **Article 8, the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations:** 10.000 newborns are deprived of a legal existence.
- **Article 19, the right to Protection from Violence:** Children are not being shielded from armed conflict, bombardment, and displacement.
- **Article 24, the right to Health:** The destruction of health services and lack of access to medical aid directly violate children's right to care.
- **Article 28 and 31, the right to Education and play:** With most schools and playgrounds damaged or destroyed, and no safe spaces available, children have been denied education and play.
- **Article 27, the right to a decent Standard of Living:** Basic needs – food, clean water, shelter – are no longer met for most children in Gaza.
- **Article 37, the right not to be subjected to torture or inhuman treatment:** This is violated through ongoing exposure to life-threatening trauma, fear, and displacement.

- **Article 39, the right to Recovery and Reintegration:** The chance for healing and psychological recovery is extremely limited, with no stable or secure environment.

### **Alarming statement from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child**

In its statement of 21 May 2025, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child condemned the obstruction of humanitarian aid and the widespread starvation among children in Gaza. The Committee highlighted that over 50 children have died from hunger, and thousands more are at immediate risk if aid does not reach them quickly.

“If the blockade continues, more children will die, and up to 71,000 children under five could suffer from acute malnutrition in the coming year”.<sup>2</sup>

The Committee reiterated that these conditions represent **serious breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law, and that there is no justification for actions which clearly defy international humanitarian law as well as international human rights law, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.**<sup>3</sup> It underscored the obligation of all states – particularly those with influence over the conflict – to act in accordance with their legal duties under the UNCRC and the Geneva Conventions.

### **A Legal and Moral Obligation to Act**

The protection of the lives of children is not the subject of political debates – it is a strong legal obligation. Children’s rights are universal, non-negotiable, and must be upheld even during war. Under international humanitarian law, parties to conflict must distinguish between civilians and combatants and take all possible steps to prevent harm to civilians, especially children.

### **ENOC calls on all responsible governments to:**

- Ensure immediate and safe access to **humanitarian aid** for all children in Gaza to allow sustained access for essential food and medical supplies and prevent deaths from starvation;
- Support an immediate **ceasefire to prevent further harm** to children;

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<sup>2</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 21 May 2025.

<sup>3</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 21 May 2025.

- **Uphold the principles** of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child, as **laid out in the UNCRC**;
- Cooperate with independent international mechanisms investigating violations of child rights;
- Guarantee access to psychosocial support, family reunification, education, and rehabilitation services for all affected children;
- Support the reconstruction of child-focused infrastructure, including schools, health clinics, and safe housing.
- Express solidarity, by hosting, for medical reasons, children who have been injured since the beginning of hostilities. It is essential that European countries take the necessary measures to provide medical care and safety for children affected by the conflict.

### **Protect children at all times and use all necessary means**

This is a **child protection emergency**. Children are not responsible for armed conflicts, but they are suffering their worst effects. ENOC calls for the urgent protection of all children affected by the situation in Gaza, and for full respect of international law to guarantee their safety, dignity, and future.

The response from the international community has been **inadequate**. Recent national and European resolutions **have failed** to implement clear measures or to condemn in an unequivocal terms the grave violations of children's rights. Millions across Europe and beyond are calling for a ceasefire and an immediate move towards long-term peace. **The children of Gaza cannot wait any longer**. Continued silence or neutrality in the face of this destruction is unacceptable.

We urge the European Union, the United Nations, and all countries that have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to live up to their responsibilities.

We call on all international institutions: Respect children's lives. **Enforce the law. Defend children's rights.**