

DETENTION OF CHILDREN IN ISRAELI PRISONS

An Educational Brief • September 2026 • A New Policy



Overview

During 2025, the United Nations verified the detention of 981 Palestinian children by Israeli security forces, 182 in East Jerusalem, 782 elsewhere in the West Bank, and 14 in Gaza¹, and received testimony from 66 children describing physical violence and other ill-treatment in Israeli custody.² The pace has not slowed. Israeli forces detained 276 Palestinian children in the first six months of 2026, and roughly 370 remained in custody as of early August 2026, most of them at Megiddo and Ofer prisons.³ Many arrests happen in the middle of the night, with heavily armed soldiers waking children at home and transferring them to interrogation sites hands-tied and blindfolded.⁴ In June 2026, the Secretary-General listed Israeli armed and security forces in Annex I of his report on children and armed conflict and called on Israel to end all administrative and arbitrary detention of children.⁵

A Separate Legal System for Palestinian Children

Palestinian children in the West Bank are prosecuted under Military Order 1651, which took effect on May 2, 2010, consolidated earlier orders including Military Order 132 (Adjudication of Juvenile Delinquents) and Military Order 1644 (Establishing a Juvenile Military Court), and sets the minimum age of criminal responsibility at 12.⁶ Military Order 1676 raised the age of majority (adulthood) in the military courts from 16 to 18 in September 2011, but the change did not extend to sentencing provisions, and 16- and 17-year-olds are still sentenced under provisions written for adults.⁶ The juvenile military court established in 2009 is understood to be the only one of its kind in the world, and it operates out of the same facilities and with the same court staff as the adult military court.⁶ Israeli citizens living in settlements in the same territory are subject to none of this; they are tried in Israeli civilian courts under Israeli juvenile law.⁷

Humiliation, Death, and Inhumane Conditions

Accounts of Children: In 2025, Save the Children interviewed 165 Palestinian children between the age of 12 and 17 who had been detained, 32 parents and care givers, 13 social workers, and three lawyers who worked directly with children. 82% of children reported being forcibly stripped naked. Children spoke of being touched or hit in the genitals, being forced to perform humiliating acts while stripped, and experienced sexual harassment and assault. Some children said they were threatened with rape, while soldiers and guards would frequently use gendered insults about the detained children's mothers and sisters, threatening to rape them and stating that they would become sex workers.⁸

On 18 May 2010, DCI-Palestine submitted 14 cases to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture for investigation. The submission relates to the sexual assault, or threat of sexual assault, of Palestinian children at the hands of Israeli soldiers, interrogators and police between January 2009 and April 2010. The ages of the children range from 13 to 16 years.⁹ As A New Policy's Josh Paul told CNN's Christiane Amanpour, "the State Department looked at DCIP-Palestine's allegations and found them to be credible." The department sent these allegations to the Israeli government. In response, the IDF went into the DCIP offices, removed their computers, and declared them a terrorist entity.

Death of Walid Ahmad, a 17-year-old Palestinian boy in Israel's Megiddo Prison

Walid Khalid Abdullah Ahmad, 17, was arrested at his family home in Silwad on September 30, 2024, and held at Megiddo prison for six months without charge. He collapsed in the prison yard and died on March 22, 2025. His family described him as healthy when he was arrested, and reported that he contracted amoebic dysentery in the prison.¹¹ An autopsy conducted by Israeli experts and observed for the family by Dr. Daniel Solomon found extreme malnutrition alongside signs of colitis and scabies, with starvation the likely leading cause of death.¹¹ The Israeli judge supervising the investigation, Ehud Kaplan, ordered it halted in December 2025. His ruling became public only when it was unsealed and published by Haaretz three months later. Kaplan wrote that the apparent starvation "cannot be hidden and should not be hidden," but concluded that the findings did not establish a causal connection between Walid's physical condition and his death. No charges have been brought.¹²



Heba* arrested at the age of 14

Heba, a pseudonym used to protect her identity, was arrested at 14 and held for eight months in 2016 and 2017. She was the youngest of five girls in a single cell. The cell barely fit two people, she said, with a doorless toilet, no ventilation window, and cockroaches through the summer. She described the water as barely drinkable and heavy with chlorine, and the food as unfit for humans: chicken served once a week with feathers still on it, undercooked and bloody inside. Her parents were permitted to visit three times across the eight months.¹³



Figure 1: Drawing by Heba*, 17



Figure 2: Drawing by Heba*, 17

Endnotes

1. Al Jazeera. (2026, March 18). Israel holding more than half of Palestinian child detainees without charge. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/18/israel-holding-more-than-half-of-palestinian-child-detainees-without-charge>
2. United Nations Secretary-General. (2026, June 16). Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General (A/80/723–S/2026/357), para. 88. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/children-and-armed-conflict-report-of-the-secretary-general-a-80-723-s-2026-357/>
3. The Arab Weekly. (2026). Nearly 400 Palestinian children held in Israeli prisons, rights group says. <https://the arabweekly.com/nearly-400-palestinian-children-held-israeli-prisons-rights-group-says>
- 3a. Middle East Eye. (2026, August 27). 370 Palestinian children being held in Israeli prisons, report says. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/live-blog/live-blog-update/370-palestinian-children-being-held-israeli-prisons-report-says>
4. UNICEF. (2013, February). Children in Israeli military detention: Observations and recommendations. United Nations Children's Fund. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-208566/>
5. 5. United Nations Secretary-General. (2026, June 16). Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General (A/80/723–S/2026/357), para. 98 and Annex I. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/children-and-armed-conflict-report-of-the-secretary-general-a-80-723-s-2026-357/>
6. UNICEF. (2013, February). Children in Israeli military detention: Observations and recommendations, Section D. United Nations Children's Fund. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-208566/>
7. Human Rights Watch. (2021, April 27). A threshold crossed: Israeli authorities and the crimes of apartheid and persecution, Section IV. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>
8. Defence for Children International – Palestine. (2010, May 18). DCI-Palestine submits 14 cases of sexual assault and threats to the UN for investigation. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/dci-palestine-submits-14-cases-sexual-assault-and-threats-un>
9. Save the Children. (2026). "Tortured": The escalating abuse of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention [Policy brief]. https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Child_Detention_Policy_Brief68.pdf
10. Amanpour, C. (Host). (2023, December 4). *He quit the State Department over US support for Israel. Here's why he did it* [Video]. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2023/12/04/amanpour-state-department-official-resignation-josh-paul.cnn>
11. Frankel, J. (2026, March 25). Israeli judge closes case of Palestinian teen's death in prison despite evidence of starvation. Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/palestinians-israel-prison-abuse-west-bank-1889d1a11da9851a1940671ba0de4963>
12. Tondo, L. (2025, April 1). Palestinian teenager Walid Ahmad dies in Israeli detention in West Bank. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/01/palestinian-teenager-walid-ahmad-dies-in-israeli-detention-in-west-bank>
13. Nicoll, C. (2020, May 21). Coronavirus: Palestinian children languish in Israeli jails 'not fit for humans.' Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/coronavirus-palestinian-children-languish-israeli-jails-not-fit-humans>

About A New Policy

Relying on foundational American values as our guiding principles, A New Policy will promote a hopeful, forward-looking vision that advances liberty, equality and human rights in Israel and Palestine.

Hardline lobbies have spent decades setting up political incentives that have skewed American politics, and by extension, American society away from a rational and moral policy in the Middle East. Meanwhile, there is no equivalent set of organizations promoting a fair and just policy centered on human rights and American interests and values. A New Policy will be the voice for that just and balanced approach.

As a nondenominational, nonsectarian, nonpartisan American organization, A New Policy will educate members of Congress on related foreign policy, legislative, and regulatory matters, and will lobby government officials to urgently pursue long-overdue policies that reflect our American values, interests, and voter preferences, as well as comply with U.S. laws. A New Policy works in partnership with organizations across the political spectrum to bring together a large American constituency that strengthens our impact and influence.

Website: ANewPolicy.org | Contact Us: info@anewpolicy.org



Learn More

