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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Institute for NGO Research, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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The United Nations (UN)'s misleading reporting on grave violations against children

In her report to the 43rd Session of the Human Rights Council, the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict notes that there are significant “challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children.” As has been recognized in past iterations of this annual report, as well as by the UN Secretary General, gathering data and reporting on grave violations against children in conflict zones is particularly challenging. Indeed, the Special Representative notes in her 2020 report that “While the verified number of cases of children recruited and used by parties to conflict has slightly decreased in the last years, this reduction does not necessarily reflect actual progress on the ground but might be the result of difficulties to access and verify information.

Volatile security situations, concerns for the protection of victims and witnesses, and financial and human resources constraints have continued to hamper verification efforts” (emphasis added).

However, despite this important recognition of the potential bias found in data provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN agencies tasked with reporting on grave violations against children, the Special Representative nonetheless makes pointed accusations against Israel using this misleading information.

For example, the Special Representative claims that the “the highest number of attacks [on schools] for 2019 were verified in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, followed by the Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan.” The Special Rapporteur provides no citations or information regarding the severity of violations in each conflict and upon which her claim is based. NGO reporting of “attacks on schools” in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza often consists of unverified claims that children are required to pass through checkpoints to attend schools or the demolition of educational facilities built in illegal structures.¹

However, according to the Children and Armed Conflict guidance note “Protect Schools + Hospitals,” these incidences are not considered to be grave violations.² Alternatively, the brutal bombing attacks against schools in the Syrian Arab Republic³ and Afghanistan⁴ are indeed violations. This presentation of information in the Special Representative’s report that lists Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza as being more severe cases than Syria and Afghanistan is therefore highly misleading.

The same misleading presentation of arguments occurs later in the report, where the Special Representative states that most cases of denial of humanitarian access to children “were verified in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, due to an increase in both the denial and the delay of Israeli-issued permits for children to exit Gaza for specialized medical care. In Yemen and Mali, verified numbers exceeded those of 2018.” Again, no sources are provided for these claims. According to a report published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), “Denial, Delay, Diversion: Tackling Access Challenges in an Evolving Humanitarian Landscape,” Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza have the lowest rate of aid workers affected by armed groups/conflict. The report further notes that militias in Yemen block “humanitarian assistance from reaching affected populations” and threaten “violence against humanitarian organizations that work within the government.” The report goes on to explain that “In June 2019, the World Food Programme initiated a phased suspension of general food distributions in Sanaa because of

¹ For example, see past reporting by EAPPI, “Education Under Occupation,” February 2013: <https://eappi.org/en/resources/publications/education-under-occupation-2013>

² Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, “Protect Schools + Hospitals,” May 2014: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/AttacksonSchoolsHospitals.pdf>

³ Al Jazeera, “Children among eight killed in Syria as missile hits school,” December 24, 2019: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/children-killed-syria-missile-hits-school-191224115623082.html>

⁴ BBC News, “Afghanistan: Blast kills nine children as they walk to school,” November 2, 2019: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50275243>

the ‘obstructive and uncooperative role of some of the Houthi leaders in areas under their control.’”⁵ In contrast, in December 2019, 254, 632 truckloads of goods passed through Israel into Gaza and there were 43,491 movements of people between Israel and Gaza. In addition, according to COGAT, approximately 35,000 medical permits were provided to individuals traveling from Gaza up from 30,000 in 2018.

The Special Representative’s report is therefore another clear example of the faulty methodology employed in UN reporting processes. Since NGOs operate freely and safely in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, and there are disproportionate numbers of such organizations in these areas feeding into the UN system as compared to other conflict zones, they are able to operate and collect data without limitation. In addition, as NGO Monitor has repeatedly documented, many of these actors are highly politicized and therefore overreport supposed Israeli violations, while ignoring violations of the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian armed groups. In contrast, the lack of NGO presence (politicized or otherwise) and access in places like Syria and Yemen results in their dire situations being minimized and underreported by the UN.

⁵ Center for Strategic and International Studies and USAID, “Denial, Delay, Diversion: Tackling Access Challenges in an Evolving Humanitarian Landscape,” September 2019: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Kurtzer_DenialDelayDiversion_WEB_FINAL.pdf