

## ***BORN INTO CONFLICT - CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE***

On the occasion of the International Day of Children's Rights on 20 November 2003:  
Summary of an international symposium

16-18 November 2003

Organised by Israel-Palestine Project/IPP, Vienna, in co-operation with the Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Amnesty International, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, Vienna and Diakonie Auslandshilfe Vienna.

Organisation and co-ordination of the conference:  
Gertraud S. Auer

Israeli and Palestinian professionals (educators, researchers, therapists, human rights experts) met at the Bruno Kreisky Forum with representatives from international organisations (including the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNICEF, the Office of the Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict/UN, the European Council of Ministers) and Austrian and Swedish officials and colleagues. There was an exchange of information and experience on the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on children. The International Day of Children's Rights on 20 November was an occasion for the organisers to emphasise the following aims of the meeting:

Draw international attention to the impact of this conflict on children.

Lobby for a child rights-based approach in regard to a future agreement between both sides that would help not only in ending the conflict but also in building societies based on the respect of international law.

Work to promote the establishment of effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms on violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict.

Assist both sides in developing concrete strategies and methodologies to help make a change in both societies.

In accordance with the wishes of the participants, the Israel-Palestine Project intended to continue this effort in promoting follow-up meetings and supporting future co-operation with this group, including those Palestinians who were not able to come this time.

The conference proved that Israelis and Palestinians can communicate and co-operate in an atmosphere of mutual respect, dignity and equality.

The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides for a comprehensive set of human rights for children, and almost all countries in the world have accepted these standards as a binding legal framework for action. And just recently, in a general debate on children affected by armed conflict, the United Nations Security Council underlined the need for parties to a conflict "to comply with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and with international law, in particular those regarding children" and called upon them "to respect fully the relevant provisions of applicable international humanitarian law relating to the rights and protection of children in armed conflict" (SC Resolution 1460 (2003), adopted on 30 January 2003).

However, protection of children's rights is far from being a reality, and the worst violations of their rights take place amidst armed conflict.

One of the longest conflicts, that has been going on for more than 50 years, is the Israeli-Palestinian one. A conflict in which various generations on both sides have been born into and in which they have lived their childhood, and their adulthood. This reality is fostered by the fact that the majority on the Palestinian side are children under the age of 16 years and a good part of the Israeli society is as well. Accordingly, on both sides children and young adults are actively involved in the conflict. It is therefore a daily reality that children are denied a peaceful living environment. On the contrary, children are targeted, killed and used as instruments for adults' political motives and ideologies. The conflict between Israel and Palestine has a shattering impact on both societies, not only on the material side, but above all on the lives and the psychological well-being of their people. And in the words of the Special Rapporteur to the UN Commission on Human Rights, "children have probably suffered most from the present conflict. Both Palestinian and Israeli children have been exposed to threats to personal safety, while Palestinian children have, in addition, felt the breakdown of family life, health care and education" (John Dugard, Report to the UN Commission on Human Rights, 17 December 2002). There is no alternative to renewed efforts towards entering the peace route again.

This Symposium aimed first at analysing the current situation of children in this conflict, with particular emphasis on the impact of violence and insecurity on child psychology and development, and second, on developing strategies that would help overcome the cycle of violence and, as such, contribute to a new culture based on respect for human rights of children. The main interest lay with Israeli as well as Palestinian children, as it is impossible to work for the welfare of the one without the other. It was the hope of the organisers that professionals on both sides would join their efforts to enable future generations to live their childhood in peace.

After four panels and two workshops, the symposium was closed with a press conference: "Future Strategies and Methodologies for Children's Rights in Israel and Palestine".

**Welcome address:**

Ambassador Georg Lennkh, member of the Board of Directors of the Bruno Kreisky Forum.

**Introduction:**

Naomi Lassar, Israel-Palestine Project/IPP, Vienna

**Keynote:**

Henrik Haggstrom, Office of the Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict/New York.

**Panels and panellists:**

**1<sup>st</sup> Panel:**

**Protection of Children in Armed Conflict - International Legal Frameworks and Protection Mechanisms**

**Chair:**

Walter Suntinger, human rights expert and university lecturer, Vienna

**Panellists:**

Hadewych Hazelzet, General Secretariat of the EU Council of Ministers, Brussels

Helmut Sax, Ludwig Boltzmann Institut, Vienna

Sally Airs, UNICEF/ Occupied Territories

Heinz Patzelt, Amnesty International Austria, Vienna

Vincent Bernard, ICRC Communication co-ordinator, Jerusalem

**2<sup>nd</sup> panel:**

**Psychological Impacts of the Conflict**

**Documentary movie: Children in conflict**

**Chair:**

Joseph Shaked, psychoanalyst, Vienna

**Panellists:**

Philipp Veerman, DCI, Israel

Zahava Solomon, Alfred Adler Institute Tel Aviv University  
Muhamad Haj-Yahia, Hebrew University Jerusalem  
Roney Srour, PCC Jerusalem

**3<sup>rd</sup> panel:**

**Children's Suffering in Environments of Violence – Survival Strategies**

**Chair and presentation:**

John Bunzl, Austrian Institute for International Affairs/OIIP, Vienna

**Panellists:**

Gehad Mazarweh, psychologist, Freiburg/Germany  
Michelle Slone, Tel Aviv University  
Amiram Raviv, Tel Aviv University  
Ruchama Marton, Physicians for Human Rights, Israel

**4<sup>th</sup> panel:**

**Social Impacts of the Conflict**

**Introduction:**

Nicolas Haysom, former adviser to Nelson Mandela, peace negotiator, South Africa

**Chair:**

Gerhard Pulfer, political scientist, Vienna

**Panellists:**

Viola Raheb, educationalist and theologian, Vienna/Bethlehem  
Lucy Nusseibeh, director of MEND Jerusalem  
Charles Greenbaum, Hebrew University, Jerusalem  
Staffan Duhs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden.