



## **Fact Sheet** **Violations documented by Palestinian Youth Human Rights Defenders in** **the Gaza Strip** **2020-2021**

This fact sheet highlights the main violations monitored and documented by youth human rights defenders in the Gaza Strip in the 2020-2021 period. It includes facts and figures that point to a general systematic Israeli policy to intentionally violate rights and freedoms - especially the right to health and right to work - in the Gaza Strip (buffer zone).

Young human rights defenders monitored and documented hundreds of violations committed in the Gaza Strip, especially in the buffer zone, in 2020-2021.

This paper summarizes the main findings of this documentation through comprehensive data, facts and figures of the perpetrated violations in the areas of operation.

### **Violation of the right to work and right to health in the buffer zone in the Gaza Strip**

#### **Violating the Right to Work in the Gaza Strip (Buffer Zone)**

- Israeli occupation authorities imposed an access-restricted zone that extends up to 1,500 meters in some areas along the Gaza separation fence. Israel intentionally attacks and bulldozes agricultural lands in this area, along with destroying all residential, agricultural, and industrial establishments within a range of 500 meters and bulldozing 75% of establishments within a range of 1,000 meters. Israel also deliberately



disrupts the movement of Palestinians in these areas, as well as destroying their properties.

- Israeli soldiers directly target Palestinian agricultural and industrial workers in the area surrounding the separation fence, especially farmers, bird hunters, shepherds, and firewood and scrap material collectors. These attacks are carried out by using different types of machine guns and heavy weaponry (including artillery and rockets) and the shooting of fire from watchtowers and military vehicles. These attacks lead to substantial human and material losses and usually prevent labourers from completing their work, thus losing their livelihoods.
- Since 2014, Israel has been regularly spraying chemical herbicides on Palestinian agricultural lands in the access-restricted areas. Their pretext is that these operations are conducted for security motives and that they aim to remove harmful weeds in the areas adjacent to the separation fence to enable the monitoring of all movement in the access-restricted areas. The spraying of chemical herbicides has long-term negative effects on crops, the environment, health, soil quality, and all creatures (*biota*) in Palestinian agricultural lands within the access-restricted areas.

### **Multiple Violations resulting from the Spraying of Chemical Herbicides:**

The spraying of toxic chemical herbicides leads to multiple violations against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip buffer zone. These violations include the following:

- ❖ **Violation of the Right to Life:** The chemical herbicides used by Israeli occupation authorities pose a serious threat to residents' lives, as these substances are highly cancerous and may lead to death. The right to life is among the most sacred rights guaranteed by



international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international criminal law. Therefore, Israel should be held accountable for using these dangerous chemical substances, which are considered a violation of the right to life, similar to other grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In fact, this violation can be classified as a crime against humanity and a war crime.

- ❖ **Violation of the Right to Health:** Chemical herbicides used by Israeli authorities threaten the health of Palestinians living in the buffer zone, as they cause chronic and cancerous diseases/tumors. This is a contravention of the international human rights law, which highlights the right of all persons to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical health.
  
- ❖ **Violation of the Right to a Clean Environment:** The spraying of toxic chemical herbicides has catastrophic environmental effects on the soil and agricultural crops. This is because they contain toxic substances that lead to long-term damages to crops, the environment, health, and soil quality. This action is inconsistent with international human rights law, especially Article (12) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which stipulates the commitment of States Parties to improve all aspects of environmental hygiene.
  
- ❖ **Violation of the Right to Work:** Israel's spraying of toxic chemical herbicides is a violation of the right to work due to the curtailing of job opportunities, thus leading to higher unemployment rates. This is



because the sprayed chemical herbicides seriously harm the soil, in a way that prevents the growth of plants for long periods of time, thus reducing employment opportunities for agricultural workers.<sup>1</sup> These practices are in clear breach of international law, especially the international human rights law. For example, Article (23) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work.<sup>2</sup> These actions are also in contravention of Articles (6) and (7) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which oblige States Parties to recognize the right to work and the right of everyone to enjoy just and favourable work conditions.

The following table includes statistical data on the violations committed by Israeli authorities in Gaza's access-restricted area by land in 2020:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of incidents</b>
Shooting and shelling on farmers and agricultural lands	612
Bird hunters	6
Shepherds	39
Arrests	15
Bombardment of empty lands	25

<sup>1</sup> The multiple violations resulting from the spraying of toxic chemical herbicides – including the violation of the right to life and right to work – will be discussed in further detail in the next section, within the context of addressing the violations against agricultural, industrial, and fishing sector workers.

<sup>2</sup> See Article (23) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.



- Between January 2005 and the end of June 2020, there were 1,092 incidents of gunfire shooting on farmers in the access-restricted area.
- In 2020, Israeli occupation forces reduced the permitted fishing areas for Palestinian fishermen to a distance of 6 nautical miles in the governorates of Gaza and Northern Gaza, and around 9-15 nautical miles in the governorates of Al-Wusta, Khan Younis and Rafah (south of the Gaza Strip). Also, Palestinian maritime activity is completely forbidden in some cases.
- In addition to the imposed restrictions, there were cases of Israel’s killing, arresting, and torturing of Palestinian fishermen and confiscating and destroying their boats and equipment. This emanated from the current Israeli policy against Palestinian fisherman and fishing sector, which aims to disrupt their livelihoods.

The following table includes data about the violations perpetrated by Israeli forces against Gaza’s fishermen in 2020:

<b>Type of Violation</b>	<b>Number of Violations in 2020</b>
Cases of gunfire shooting	308
Number of detainees	10
Number of injuries	12
Number of confiscated boats	4
Number of cases of sabotaging fishing boats	12



The Israeli attacks on agricultural, industrial, and fishing sector workers have led to the following violations:

a. **Violation of the Right to Life**, in contravention of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

b. **Violation of the Right to Freedom and the Practice of Torture**, whereas the right to freedom is considered one of the most vital rights highlighted by international human rights conventions. There were also many cases in which Israel arrested Palestinian residents in the buffer zone (especially farmers and fishermen) and subjected them to torture.

The Israeli authorities' practice of torture against Palestinians living in the buffer zone – especially farmers and fishermen – is a flagrant violation of international law, including international human rights law, which highlights the duties of States Parties towards all persons under their control. These actions also violate the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (especially Article (7) of this Covenant) and the United Nations Convention against Torture.

The aforementioned Israeli practices also violate the international humanitarian law, which is concerned with the duties of the occupying power vis-à-vis the residents of occupied territories. Within this framework, the said Israeli actions violate the Fourth Geneva Convention, especially Article (3)(1)(a). Furthermore, Article (147) of the Fourth Geneva Convention considers torture among the “grave breaches” that entail the activation of universal jurisdiction and the undertaking of effective penal measures in accordance with Article (146) of the said convention.



The aforementioned Israeli practices are also inconsistent with the Rome Statute, whose seventh article tackles the subject of crimes against humanity.

### **Violation of the Right to Work:**

The various measures implemented by Israeli authorities against Palestinian residents inside the buffer zone (especially farmers) seriously affect the right to work and increase the unemployment rate. This constitutes a blatant violation of international law, especially the international human rights law. For example, Article (23) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that “*everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work*”. Israeli actions are also inconsistent with Article (25) of the said Declaration, which states that “*everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family*”. Additionally, Articles (6) and (7) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights oblige countries to recognize the right to work and the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work.

### **Violation of the Right to Health:**

- Gaza Strip patients are continuously suffering from unjust restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities, which prevent them from going to hospital to receive treatment in light of the difficult permit system. This suffering is exacerbated by the great shortage in medicines and medical supplies in the Gaza Strip due to Israel’s ongoing siege on Gaza. For example, the imposed siege has prevented the Ministry of Health from fixing 350 medical devices due to their inability to import spare parts for medical





devices, leading to the deterioration of health conditions and seriously threatening people's lives.

- Other violations are committed by Israel in addition to the imposed siege and restrictions on the entry of medicines and medical supplies into Gaza. Examples include targeting the Palestinian health sector - in clear breach of international humanitarian law - by bombing hospitals, medical workers, health care centers, and ambulances. This significantly weakened the [Palestinian] health sector and prevented the accommodation of patients, especially severe health cases that need special care. MIFTAH organization monitored and detected 418 violations of the right to health in 2020.
- The above-mentioned Israeli practices are inconsistent with international law, especially international human rights law. For example, Article (25) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stresses the right of everyone to receive medical care in the event of sickness. These Israeli actions also violate Article (12) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which stipulates that everyone has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical health. This article also obligates States Parties to create conditions that would assure medical service and medical attention to all persons in the event of sickness.

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