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Policy Paper: Education in the Old City of Hebron

Executive Summary:

This paper discusses the effects of Israeli violations on children’s right to education in the Old City of Hebron. This includes highlighting the illegal actions perpetrated against Palestinian schools, pupils and teachers. These actions created an unsafe environment for children’s right to education, and they constitute *forced displacement*, as they aim to reduce the number of Palestinian students in Hebron’s Old City. These policies led to a noticeable decline in the number of young students therein. The paper also recommends a set of practical policies to guarantee the safe continuation of education in the Old City of Hebron.

Introduction:

Students of schools located in Hebron’s Old City and its surroundings – which are classified as Areas “C” and “H2” in Hebron City – face a number of challenges that hinder their right to education. These challenges stem from the Israeli actions and procedures that target this area’s population all year long. In this context, Israel executes a systematic policy that aims to continuously harass the local residents to force them to leave their homes.

The right to education was guaranteed in international human rights law, including numerous human rights conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. This right was also stipulated in several agreements signed by both Israel and Palestine, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural



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Rights of 1966 (Articles 13 and 14¹); Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (Articles 28 and 29²); and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24³). Moreover, there is the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which obliges the occupying power to guarantee the right to education for the civilian population under its control, and prohibits the violation of this right since it is a basic human right.⁴ Nevertheless, the Israeli authorities constantly harass Palestinian students in several ways, such as the deployment of numerous military checkpoints, impeding the movement of local residents, preventing pupils from reaching their schools, hindering the arrival of materials for renovating classrooms, and raiding schools and throwing gas and stun grenades at them. Israeli authorities also arrest and detain pupils and sometimes beat them, leading to a number of wounded children while studying at school.

These illegal Israeli actions made the educational sector quite unsafe and unstable, both for teachers and pupils alike. This prompted many governmental and local institutions (including civilian initiatives) to intervene to protect the educational sector in the Old City of Hebron for fear of its total collapse. Consequently, the Palestinian Ministry of Education started paying additional amounts to teachers in these areas under the “Risk Allowance” financial item.⁵ Furthermore, the local organizations and civilian initiatives created “human bridges” to help

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx> .

² The State of Palestine acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in April 2014. See: *Initial report submitted by the State of Palestine under Article 44 of the Convention, due in 2016*: <https://bit.ly/2U524wv>

³ The State of Palestine acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in April 2014, as published on the official website of the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <https://bit.ly/3pNeKUw>, while confirming that international human rights law is binding upon all parties, including the occupying power, given that human rights are the right of every person on an equal footing and may not be violated by any party whatsoever.

⁴ Sobhi Tawil, *International humanitarian law and basic education*, International Committee of the Red Cross website: <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/article/other/57jqg4.htm>

⁵ Palestinian Ministry of Education



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pupils reach their schools and protect them from the violations of Jewish settlers and Israeli forces, as stated by local residents during the interviews conducted by the Youth Human Rights Defenders group in Hebron.

Policy Paper Objective:

This paper aims to highlight the procedures, policies and role of official, unofficial and international organizations to protect education in the Old City of Hebron in light of the ongoing Israeli violations. The paper also presents recommendations for ways to confront and halt these illegal actions.

Problem:

The paper presents the following policy problem:

- *What policies should be adopted to provide a safe educational environment in the Old City of Hebron?*

Situation of Education in the Old City of Hebron:

The paper sheds light on the violations perpetrated against 44 schools in the Old City of Hebron. These schools were divided into three categories, as follows:

1. Schools of Area “C”, 11 in total, which serve 4,277 pupils.⁶
2. Schools of Hebron’s Old City, 9 in total, serving 1,800 pupils.⁷

⁶ Palestinian Ministry of Education

⁷ Palestinian Ministry of Education



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3. Schools of “H2” area, 24 in total, serving 11,084 pupils.⁸

In 2019, the Palestinian Ministry of Education documented 218 violations against students and employees in the aforementioned schools, during which 5,960 pupils were subjected to physical harm and 18,391 pupils underwent psychological harm.⁹ As for 2020, the number of violations was 53, during which 263 pupils were subjected to physical harm and 3,623 pupils underwent psychological harm.¹⁰ It is worth noting that the decrease in the number of violations was due to the intermittent school attendance (for several months) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The blatant Israeli violations were categorized as follows:¹¹

Violation Year	Stopping pupils at checkpoints and searching them intensively	Throwing gas and stun grenades	Harassing pupils	Running over or trying to run over pupils	Raiding schools	Denying the passage of pupils or teachers	Physical harm	Nuisance without direct contact	Injury	Arrest	Material/ financial damages
2019	66	96	23	8	14	18	20	20	4	13	4
2020	19	5	7	2	3	3	4	10	2	6	0

It is worth noting that, in 2019, a total of 2,382 pupils (both male and female) were denied safe access to their schools in the Old City of Hebron and its surroundings.¹² The schools of these areas are also subjected to other kinds of harassment, such as preventing

⁸ Palestinian Ministry of Education

⁹ Palestinian Ministry of Education, Report on violations against schools according to the type of damage, 2019.

¹⁰ Palestinian Ministry of Education, Report on violations against schools according to the type of damage, 2020.

¹¹ Palestinian Ministry of Education, Report on violations against schools according to the type of damage, 2019-2020.

¹² Palestinian Ministry of Education, Annual report on the monitored Israeli violations of the right to education, 2019.



restorations, denying the entry of renovation equipment, and prohibiting all changes to school structures.¹³

The lack of safe access to education has serious implications for children, such as lowering the level of school attendance, increasing school dropout rates, displacement of families, separation of family members as they search for solutions that guarantee their children's access to school in other locations, etc. Anecdotal evidence¹⁴ has shown that these actions lead to many school dropouts, especially among young girls and children with disabilities. In light of these barriers to education, thousands of Palestinian students lack the sense of safety at school and on their way to/from it. Moreover, parents are increasingly becoming worried about sending their children to school.

There are various types of Israeli violations documented by the Young Human Rights Defenders group in the Old City of Hebron, whereas the Israeli occupation forces are unreluctantly using different forms of repression and force on Old City residents, especially against students and educational workers in Hebron. These practices include the following:

- Israel does not abide by International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the bilateral agreements signed with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which prescribed the duty to respect the Palestinian people's right to education without restrictions (as mentioned also by the Oslo Accords).

¹³ Hasan Ibrahim A'mar, Principal of the Ibrahimi Basic School for Boys.

¹⁴ Young Human Rights Defenders group, interviews with young students' parents.



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- Stopping and searching pupils and teachers at checkpoints. These violations occurred 66 times in 2019 and 19 times in 2020.¹⁵
- Denying the entry of building materials and renovation equipment to improve schools' infrastructure.
- Raiding schools and conducting arrests inside of them. For example, the year 2019 saw 13 such cases (where pupils and educational employees were arrested at school), and 6 such cases were witnessed in 2020.¹⁶
- The throwing of teargas canisters and stun grenades in school yards, whereas this violation took place 96 times in 2019 and 5 times in 2020.¹⁷
- Insulting students at checkpoints and detaining them.¹⁸

In light of what was mentioned above, the paper presents the following alternatives and recommendations to relevant Palestinian and international parties, to enable them to formulate policies that help create a safer environment for young students in the Old City of Hebron. The paper assumes that these suggestions can be implemented simultaneously, in order to have a maximum impact within a reasonable period of time.

First Alternative: Formation of an international committee to protect school students:

After the occupation terminated the operations of TIPH (Temporary International Presence in Hebron), it became necessary to find an

¹⁵ Palestinian Ministry of Education, Report on violations against schools according to the type of damage, 2019-2020.

¹⁶ Palestinian Ministry of Education, Report on violations against schools according to the type of damage, 2019-2020.

¹⁷ Palestinian Ministry of Education, Report on violations against schools according to the type of damage, 2019-2020.

¹⁸ Young Human Rights Defenders group, Testimonies of 2019-2021.



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alternative body to protect young students, monitor Israeli violations, and facilitate the entry of essential equipment to schools. Such an international presence can monitor and deter the occupation and enhance international supervision over Israeli soldiers and policies. This body can also create a tool of international pressure to protect young students in Hebron. Therefore, international organizations must work diligently to restore their presence in the Old City of Hebron.

Second Alternative: Provide special programs for school students in the Old City of Hebron

Many young students showed several symptoms of distress, such as involuntary urination, insomnia (such as nightmares), violent behavior, malingering,¹⁹ laziness, and a constant feeling of unsafety. Therefore, it is necessary to provide them with psychological care programs and recreational/entertainment classes to enhance a positive spirit that links them to their schools. Also, teachers should be given special courses to deal more effectively with students who suffer from violations. These courses can be provided in coordination between the Palestinian Ministry of Education, international organizations, and NGOs that assist children and protect their rights, especially UNICEF and DCI.

General Recommendations:

To categorize students in Hebron's Old City schools, by creating a database related to the numbers and types of violations suffered by them. It is also essential to document the violations committed by Israeli forces and settlers against Palestinian students and teachers, in order to analyze the types of perpetrated violations and the best ways to confront them.

¹⁹ Pretending to be sick.



Based on the aforementioned activities, it is important to do interventions with schools to address their daily issues and introduce creative solutions to the challenges facing the educational sector. Furthermore, we recommend providing psychological support to families in these areas, as well as enhancing direct communication between Hebron Governorate, Directorate of Education, and active organizations and bodies, in order to coordinate their work and unify their efforts.
