

Pity the Children: Violence Against Children has Become an Epidemic

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Global Research, July 08, 2014

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Palestine and Israel

Three Israeli teenagers murdered on Palestinian soil. One Palestinian boy burnt to death whilst alive in an apparent retaliation.

Over the years of conflict thousands of children have been killed *although many more on the Palestinian side than the Israeli.*

According to the Old Testament's Book of Numbers, Moses, when leading the trek to the "Promised Land", once ordered all the women and children in one hostile tribe in their way, the Midianites, to be killed.

Moses is as important a figure to Muslim theologians as he is to Jewish yet I've never come across the writings of a major theologian in either religion loudly condemning this mass murder.

The killing of the innocents in the "Promised Land" goes on three thousand years later.

Last year eight Palestinian children (six boys and two girls) were killed and 1,265 were injured in the occupied Palestinian territories either by Israeli settlers or by Israeli security forces. No Israeli children were killed in 2013.

Four Palestinian boys were killed by Israeli security forces in the Al Jalazun, Jenin and Ayda refugee camps. Incursions into the camps increased by 60 per cent compared with 2012.

The 1,235 children injured in the West Bank (155 under the age of 12) are more than double the number injured in 2012 (552). 49 children were injured directly by Israeli settlers. Eight Israeli children were injured in Israeli settlements by Palestinians.

Israel and Palestine are not alone.

The report: Violence is increasing

In 2013, hundreds of thousands of children were recruited and used, killed and maimed, victims of sexual violence and other grave violations in 23 conflict situations around the world.

These are some of the findings unveiled last week in the annual UN report on children and armed conflict, presented by the Secretary-General, Ban ki- Moon.

“We have documented the cases of children recruited and used by 7 national armies and 50 armed groups fighting wars in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Syria, and in eleven other countries.”, he said.

2013 was marked by an increase in the number of children killed or mutilated in countries such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Somalia, the Congo, Syria and Iraq.

Central African Republic, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Syria...

The Central African Republic is still scarred by the deeds of the Emperor Bokassa who ruled in the 1970s. In a great piece of detective work Amnesty International unveiled many aspect of Bokassa’s sordid rule that included the murder of at least a hundred school children, suffocated to death in jails.

The revelation was the electoral undoing of President Giscard d’Estaing of France who had befriended Bokassa and received a present of diamonds from him.

Today as another civil war drags on in the country hundreds of children are estimated to have been killed or maimed by machetes, firearms and other weaponry.

This time France is acting as a peace-maker but seems unable to stop either this or the recruitment of child soldiers.

In *Nigeria* over 200 schoolgirls have been captured and spirited away by Boko Haram.

In *Afghanistan*, as US and Nato troops prepare to depart, Unicef has documented the recruitment and use last year of 97 boys as child soldiers. Some were as young as eight years of age. The majority of the children (72) were reportedly recruited by armed opposition groups, including the Taliban and the Haqqani Network.

Nine of the children were recruited to conduct suicide attacks. In one incident, in May 2013, a 15-year-old boy conducted a suicide attack against an Afghan police commander in Muqur district, Gazhni Province, killing three local police officers and two civilians and injuring 16 civilians.

More than 10,000 children are estimated to have been killed since the outset of the conflict in *Syria* and the killing and maiming of children has increased exponentially in 2013 and this year.

We should not forget that it was protests organised by teenage children and the savage way the regime treated them that triggered the civil uprising that then morphed into a guerrilla war.

The use of barrel bombs by government forces in Aleppo city in December alone led to hundreds of children killed and injured.

Children also continue to be killed in ground offensives by government forces. On 29 January, during the “Al-Queiq river” massacre in Bustan al-Qasr district of Aleppo, at least 10 children were reportedly among those summarily executed.

Other massacres were reportedly committed by government forces in several villages in the Al-Sfera area. In Mazrat al Rahib village at least three children were reportedly summarily

executed along with at least 58 men.

UN members and the International Criminal Court

Violence against children has become an epidemic.

It is seen as an easy way of cowing a population and as a cheap means of recruiting disposable soldiers.

The UN secretary-general has aimed the spotlight. The membership must open its eyes and bring to task its errant countries.

It should refer these countries or the movements within them to the International Criminal Court for prosecution.

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