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# ISRAEL

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## State of Israel

**Population:** 6.7 million (2.2 million under 18)

**Government armed forces:** 168,000

**Compulsory recruitment age:** 18

**Voluntary recruitment age:** 17

**Voting age:** 18

**Optional Protocol:** ratified 18 July 2005

**Other treaties ratified (see glossary):**

CRC, ILO 138, ILO 182

***The minimum age of conscription was 18 and volunteers were accepted from age 17. Military training was widespread for under-18s. Under-18s were recruited as volunteers in the police-affiliated civil guard. Israeli children around Hebron were used by extreme settler movements in violent activities. Israeli military forces continued to arrest large numbers of Palestinian children, some of whom were tortured during detention. Palestinian and Lebanese armed groups launched attacks on Israeli civilian targets, killing and injuring a number of Israeli children.***

## Context

The Palestinian intifada (uprising) against Israeli occupation continued into 2007. Nearly 6,000 people had been killed during the conflict, including 129 Israeli children killed by Palestinian forces<sup>1</sup> and 889 Palestinian children killed by Israeli forces.<sup>2</sup> Israel withdrew settlers and troops from the Gaza Strip in August–September 2005, although since then it had conducted frequent armed raids into the area.<sup>3</sup> Israeli withdrawal from four West Bank settlements also took place, but Israel confiscated Palestinian land through its construction of the “separation barrier” around the West Bank.<sup>4</sup> The wall reduced the scope for direct conflict, but there were frequent clashes between settler communities and Palestinians. Syria and Lebanon remained formally at war with Israel, which occupied disputed territory of both countries. In July 2006 Israel launched an intensive month-long military campaign in Lebanon after the abduction of two of its soldiers. The July 2006 conflict resulted in the deaths of seven Israeli and nearly 400 Lebanese children.<sup>5</sup>

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## Government

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### National recruitment legislation and practice

All Israelis were required to perform military service from the age of 18.<sup>6</sup> Men were expected to serve for 36 months and women for 24 months. Children were assessed and interviewed for service in the armed forces from the age of 16 and a half, and at 17 were issued formal call-up notices. Voluntary recruitment was allowed from the age of 17, although the armed forces stated that “frontline” duties were only possible from 18.<sup>7</sup> Exemption was possible on medical grounds and by discretion of the Minister of Defence.<sup>8</sup> Only women could state religion or family status as grounds for exemption.<sup>9</sup>

### Military training and military schools

Israeli children received familiarization and military training well below the age of recruitment. Most schools had uniformed teacher-soldiers and youth guides on their staff who provided a link between the education system and the military establishment.<sup>10</sup> Official pre-recruitment activities started at the age of 15–16 (tenth grade).<sup>11</sup> By the 11th–12th grade (age 16 up) students were reportedly “saturated with the idea of enlistment” through a range of promotional events and material.<sup>12</sup> Gadna, or youth battalions, ran a one-week military training program on an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) base as part of the curriculum for 16–17-year-olds at most Jewish state schools.<sup>13</sup>

The armed forces also directly administered schools, including the Beit Biram Military Boarding School in Haifa, which accepted students from age 14.<sup>14</sup> Pupils were called cadets and wore military uniforms.<sup>15</sup> The Israeli Air Force (IAF) ran four technical schools for children aged 13 and above. Amal High School in Ramat David was a joint military–civilian facility for children aged 13 and older based on an IAF base.<sup>16</sup>

A number of voluntary summer and extra-curricular courses involving military training were available for Israeli and foreign children from the age of 14–15. These included courses run directly by the IDF and those run by other organizations, such as the scouts.<sup>17</sup> Trials to serve in elite units of the military began from the age of 17. In 2006 there was controversy when 17-year-old Itai Sharon died of heatstroke during Israeli Air Force (IAF) trials.<sup>18</sup> The subsequent internal inquiry identified a series of failures in the IAF's treatment of Sharon.<sup>19</sup> Also in 2006, 17-year old Aharon Tzarfati died accidentally during physical evaluations for a naval commando program. He was among two hundred 17–18-year-olds taking part.<sup>20</sup>

## Child recruitment and deployment

There were no reported instances of under-18s serving in combat duty with the IDF. However, in Hebron young Israeli children from settlements often mingled with soldiers on duty and sat in military checkpoints, even when Palestinians were present.<sup>21</sup> On occasion IDF soldiers were reported to have stood by, or given tacit encouragement, as Israeli children engaged in hostile behaviour towards Palestinians.<sup>22</sup> In one case an Israeli soldier showed a Palestinian's identity papers to two settler children, aged around 12. They and four other children then threw stones at the Palestinian under the gaze of the soldier.<sup>23</sup>

In 2007 three incidents were documented where Palestinian children were used as human shields by the IDF in and around Nablus, two years after an Israeli Supreme Court ruling banned this practice.<sup>24</sup> In one case, an 11-year-old girl was sent into a derelict building ahead of IDF soldiers investigating the source of shooting.<sup>25</sup> In another case, a 15-year-old boy was told to walk ahead of soldiers searching his family home, the soldiers firing five or six shots.<sup>26</sup>

Israel's internal security agency, known as Shabak or Shin Bet, was also alleged to have attempted to recruit Palestinian children as informants. An official from the Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces told DCI-Palestine, a non-governmental organization (NGO), that 40 per cent of Palestinians accused of collaborating with the Israeli forces and arrested by the PA were children. The youngest he had encountered was 12.<sup>27</sup> A 16-year-old boy from Hebron was arrested by Israeli forces and held in solitary confinement at Ashkelon Prison in Israel for 35 days in 2007. He was mistreated during his detention and pressed to become an informant.<sup>28</sup> Previous studies showed that such approaches were common during detention.<sup>29</sup>

In 2006 around 700 Palestinian under-18s were detained by Israeli forces, under military provisions that contravened international humanitarian law and standards of juvenile justice.<sup>30</sup> Incidents of ill-treatment and torture remained common.<sup>31</sup> In one case, a 17-year-old boy was arrested in July 2007 on charges of attempting to recruit a suicide bomber. During the journey to the detention centre, he was kicked and trampled on by Israeli soldiers. Interrogators slapped him repeatedly and slammed his head against a desk. After initial interrogation he was held for five days in a cell with Palestinian informants and for 15 days in solitary confinement.<sup>32</sup>

The Israeli police force encouraged older Israeli children to volunteer for its 70,000-strong civil guard.<sup>33</sup> The guard undertook community policing alongside more security-focused roles such as foot patrols, checkpoint security and security sweeps.<sup>34</sup> Under-18s were noted taking

part in a limited capacity from the tenth grade and received weapons training and firearms from 11th grade (16–17).<sup>35</sup>

## Armed groups

### Palestinian groups

The military wings of Palestinian political groups – Hamas, Fatah, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) – continued attacks against Israelis in Palestinian areas and in Israel.<sup>36</sup> One hundred and twenty-nine Israeli children were killed in attacks since 2000.<sup>37</sup> They included two 16-year-olds who were killed in a suicide bombing at a Netanya shopping centre in July 2005.<sup>38</sup> The attack was carried out by 18-year-old Ahmed Abu Khalil and claimed by Islamic Jihad.<sup>39</sup> One older Palestinian child was killed during attempts to cross the Israeli border on behalf of an armed group. No under-18s were known to have been involved in suicide bombings since 2004.<sup>40</sup> The shelling of Sderot, on the border with Gaza, by Palestinian armed groups constituted a threat to children on both sides of the border.<sup>41</sup> In September 2007 Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for a rocket attack that landed metres away from an Israeli kindergarten.<sup>42</sup>

### Lebanese groups

Hizbollah conducted a number of raids and shelled Israeli positions prior to the July 2006 war. During the month-long battle, Hizbollah's shelling of northern Israel resulted in the deaths of seven children, as well as damage to 23 schools and 11 kindergartens. Six thousand Israeli children required psychological treatment as a result of the violence.<sup>43</sup>

### Israeli settlers

Israeli children living in settlements were frequently involved in violent confrontations with Palestinian neighbours and, on occasion, international observers. In Hebron, observers reported the systematic use of youngsters under 12 to carry out acts of violence and vandalism against Palestinians and their property.<sup>44</sup> Israel's police commander in the Hebron region said, "We have a major problem here. They [the settlers] understand our weak point – and they use children under the age of criminal responsibility, under the age of twelve. They do this intentionally. They [the children] are the tactical wing, even the strategic wing, of the adults."<sup>45</sup> The Israeli NGO Yesh Din found that of 150 cases of complaints of settler violence opened in 2005 and closed by November that year, 50 involved children under the age of criminal responsibility, all from the Hebron area.<sup>46</sup> One adult victim from the Tel Rumeida area of Hebron reported that "settler children attack us, with

the parents encouraging them and standing next to them”.<sup>47</sup> A number of videos of child settler violence were posted on the Internet in 2006–7.<sup>48</sup> Attacks by groups of older Israeli children against Palestinians in the area were reported on a relatively frequent basis.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout the West Bank, and formerly in the Gaza Strip, older Israeli children were reportedly involved in the building and securing of new outposts. This included four under-18s who were charged in 2007 for their role in building the outpost of Shevut Ami on Palestinian land.<sup>50</sup> The precise affiliation of the child activists was unclear, although observers said that they were well organized and briefed.<sup>51</sup> They were often referred to in the Israeli press as “Hilltop Youth”, although this was an umbrella term for a number of diverse groups.<sup>52</sup> During the first seven months of 2005, 688 Israeli under-18s were detained for their role in protests against the pull-out from Gaza and outpost settlements, but in 2007 state prosecutors decided to drop charges against 60 minors indicted for assault against the security forces in August 2005.<sup>53</sup> During the IDF evacuation of Homesh in the northern West Bank in March 2007, up to 2,500 activists, most of them teenagers, attempted to repopulate the area.<sup>54</sup> In April 2006 a movement called “Youth for the Land of Israel” rallied 1,000 protestors for a demonstration at Bet El, when a 17-year-old participant was injured in clashes with Palestinians.<sup>55</sup>

“Youth for the Land of Israel” was also alleged to have organized “hikes” in the West Bank by means of leafleting campaigns in schools.<sup>56</sup> This activity often involved groups of Israeli settlers trespassing on Palestinian land and sometimes ended in clashes. Local settlement councils also encouraged older children to participate in hikes as part of local youth activities.<sup>57</sup>

## Developments

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) were noted as situations of concern in the UN Secretary-General’s reports to the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict in February 2005 and October 2006.<sup>58</sup> The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict visited the area in April 2007. She recommended the establishment of independent investigation mechanisms to follow up alleged violations of children’s rights. She suggested that Israel review its policies on detention for Palestinian children. The Special Representative also called on Palestinian armed factions in Gaza to respect humanitarian law and halt all indiscriminate rocket fire into Israel.<sup>59</sup>

A number of government and non-government programs supported Israeli children affected by the conflict. This includes the Psychological Counselling Service in state schools.<sup>60</sup> The Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma set up

the “Living Under Fire” program for children in Sderot, Nahariya and Haifa after the 2006 conflict with Lebanon.<sup>61</sup> NATAL – the Israel Center for Victims of Terror and War – was one of a number of groups running programs for residents of Sderot, including children.<sup>62</sup>

## International standards

Israel ratified the Optional Protocol in July 2005. Its declaration confirmed that the minimum age for voluntary recruitment was 17 and that no one under 18 could be posted to combat duty. The declaration said that in order to ensure that recruitment of under-18s was not forced or coerced, written permission from the parents or guardian, reliable proof of age and explanation of the duties were required.<sup>63</sup> In March 2005 Israel ratified ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.<sup>64</sup>

- 1 B’Tselem statistics to 31 October 2007 from 29 September 2000, [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org).
- 2 Information from DCI Palestine Section, to 5 November 2007.
- 3 See for example “One year after the ‘Disengagement’: Gaza still occupied and under attack”, *al Haq*, September 2006, [www.alhaq.org](http://www.alhaq.org).
- 4 UN Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “The Humanitarian Impact on Palestinians of Israeli Settlements and Other Infrastructure in the West Bank”, July 2007, [www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org).
- 5 The UN estimated that a third of 1,191 deaths in Lebanon were minors: “Major violations on both sides in Israel–Lebanon conflict, say UN Experts”, 4 October 2006, [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch).
- 6 Defence Service Law, Consolidated Version 5746-1986.
- 7 New Profile (Israeli non-governmental organization), “Child Recruitment in Israel”, 29 July 2004.
- 8 Defence Service Law, above note 6.
- 9 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 2005, [www.mfa.gov.il](http://www.mfa.gov.il).
- 10 Interview with New Profile, 11 September 2007.
- 11 Hanan Greenberg, “IDF to look at teen’s motivation”, *Ynet News*, 29 August 2006.
- 12 Interview with New Profile, above note 10.
- 13 New Profile, above note 7.
- 14 *Ibid*.
- 15 See [www.panmaz.co.il](http://www.panmaz.co.il).
- 16 New Profile, above note 7.
- 17 See Gadna programmes at <http://dover.idf.il/>; Tzofim brochure, [www.chetz-vkeshet.org.il](http://www.chetz-vkeshet.org.il).
- 18 Information from DCI-Israel, 18 October 2007.
- 19 Nir Hasson and Yoav Stern, “Report: IAF failures to blame for teen’s death in pre-pilot course”, *Ha’aretz*, 17 December 2006.
- 20 Amos Harel, “Naval Commando Candidate Dies During Pre-Conscription Trials”, *Ha’aretz*, 19 September 2006.

- 21 Interview with international observers in Hebron, 13 September 2007.
- 22 See numerous case studies in Yesh Din, "A Semblance of Law", June 2006.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 B'Tselem, "Human Shields", background, [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org).
- 25 Incident in February 2007, information received from DCI-Palestine Section, 10 September 2007.
- 26 B'Tselem, "Israeli soldiers use 'Amid 'Amirah, 15, as human shield, Nablus, February 2007", [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org).
- 27 DCI-Palestine, "Dealing with alleged child collaborators in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child", April 2005, [www.dci-pal.org](http://www.dci-pal.org).
- 28 Documented by DCI-Palestine Section, 19 July 2007, [www.dci-pal.org](http://www.dci-pal.org).
- 29 "Dealing with alleged child collaborators", above note 27.
- 30 UN Report, Visit of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to the Middle East, 9–20 April 2007.
- 31 DCI-Palestine Section, "Palestinian Child Prisoners Report 2006", March 2007, [www.dci-pal.org](http://www.dci-pal.org).
- 32 Information received from DCI-Palestine Section, 28 November 2007.
- 33 Israeli police website, [www.police.gov.il](http://www.police.gov.il).
- 34 Israeli police civil guard information, [www.police.gov.il](http://www.police.gov.il).
- 35 New Profile, above note 7.
- 36 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Suicide and Other Bombing Attacks in Israel since the Declaration of Principles (Sept 1993)", [www.mfa.gov.il](http://www.mfa.gov.il).
- 37 B'Tselem, "Statistics to 29 September 2007 from start of Intifada, 29 September 2000", [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org).
- 38 B'Tselem, "Israeli minors killed by Palestinians in Israel and Palestine to 31 October 2007", [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org).
- 39 "Israel reoccupies West Bank town", BBC News, 13 July 2005.
- 40 Information from DCI-Palestine Section, 20 October 2007.
- 41 For instance Qassam rocket damage to a school and shrapnel injuries to a child, reported by child protection agencies working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), July–August 2007.
- 42 "Sderot schools launch strike because of Palestinian resistance's rockets", Paltoday News Network, 4 September 2007.
- 43 UN Report, above note 30.
- 44 Yesh Din, above note 22; B'Tselem and Association for Civil Rights in Israel, "Ghost town: Israel's separation policy and forced eviction of Palestinians from the center of Hebron", May 2007.
- 45 Meron Rappoport, "Ghost Town", *Ha'aretz*, 18 November, 2005.
- 46 Yesh Din, above note 22.
- 47 Testimony of Taysir Aby 'Ayesh, "Ghost town", above note 44.
- 48 See Ali Waked, "Hebron settlers filmed throwing rocks at Palestinians", *Ynet News*, 3 August 2007; Nir Hasson, "Hebron settler filmed attacking Arabs", *Ha'aretz*, 12 January 2007.
- 49 Testimony of Fawzi Abu Armila of stone-throwing by 16–19-year-olds, given to B'Tselem, 14 January 2007, [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org).
- 50 Email contact with Yesh Din, 29 October 2007.
- 51 Telephone conversation with DCI-Israel, 18 October 2007; interview with Amir Givol, New Profile, 11 September 2007.
- 52 E-mail conversation with New Profile, 24 October 2007.
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- 57 Telephone interview with Director of Research, Yesh Din, 18 October 2007.
- 58 UN Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict, UN Doc. A/59/695-S/2005/72, 9 February 2005; UN Doc. A/61/529-S/2006/826, 26 October 2006.
- 59 UN Report, above note 30.
- 60 "Delays in school and trauma in northern Israel following Israel–Hezbollah conflict", *Ha'aretz*, 22 August 2006.
- 61 Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma, [www.traumaweb.org](http://www.traumaweb.org).
- 62 NATAL, [www.natal.org.il](http://www.natal.org.il).
- 63 Declaration on accession to Optional Protocol: [www2.ohchr.org](http://www2.ohchr.org).
- 64 International Labour Organization (ILO), Database of International Labour Standards, [www.ilo.org/](http://www.ilo.org/) (ilolex database).