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More women and children killed in Gaza by Israeli military than any other recent conflict in a single year – Oxfam

Israeli explosive weapons hit civilian infrastructure in Gaza - including schools, hospitals and aid distribution points - once every three hours

More women and children have been killed in Gaza by the Israeli military over the past year than the equivalent period of any other conflict over the past two decades, new Oxfam analysis has found. As hostilities and tragic loss of life spread in Lebanon and the West Bank - including East Jerusalem - the regional escalation underscores the urgent need for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

Conservative figures show that more than 6,000 women and 11,000 children were killed in Gaza by the Israeli military over the last 12 months. Data from 2004-2021 on direct conflict deaths from the Small Arms Survey, estimates that the highest number of women killed in a single year was over 2,600 in Iraq in 2016.

A report by the organisation Every Casualty Counts examined information on over 11,000 children killed across the first 2.5 years of the Syria conflict, an average of over 4,700 deaths a year. UN reports on Children and Armed Conflict over the last 18 years show that no other conflict killed a higher number of children in one year.

Israel's military assault began last October, following the attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups. Almost 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals were killed, including at least 282 women and 36 children - the deadliest day in Israel's history. These targeted attacks constituted serious violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). More than 250 people, including 38 children, were taken hostage, 96 of whom are reported to still be held in Gaza.

Separate data from Action on Armed Violence up to 23 September shows that Israel hit civilian infrastructure across Gaza with explosive weapons once every three hours on average since the war began. Other than the six-day humanitarian pause last November, there were just two days in the entire year without bombardment.

Records - which are not comprehensive - show that Israeli explosive weapons hit, on average:

- Homes every four hours
- Tents and temporary shelters every 17 hours
- Schools and hospitals every four days
- Aid distribution points and warehouses every 15 days

Throughout the last year Israel has committed serious violations of IHL at a level which may rise to the level of crimes against humanity. This includes a level of destruction observed which is indicative of Israel's use of disproportionate force in relation to military objectives and a failure to discriminate between military targets and the civilian population. The Israeli military has relentlessly targeted infrastructure indispensable to civilian survival. Civilians have been forcibly displaced dozens of times to so-called 'safe zones' that fail to meet humanitarian obligations and have also been regularly bombed or attacked.

The UN Children and Armed Conflict reports highlight the number of Palestinian children killed in Gaza and the West Bank. In the last year, over five times more children were killed in Gaza than between 2005 and 2022.

The record number of women and children killed in Gaza does not include those among nearly 20,000 people who are either unidentified, missing or entombed beneath rubble. Earlier this year, a study published in The Lancet estimated the true number of deaths in Gaza could be over 186,000, taking indirect deaths – for example due to starvation and lack of health care – into consideration.

Civilian infrastructure has either been completely destroyed or severely damaged, including around 68 per cent of cropland and roads. Only 17 of 36 hospitals remain partially functional, and all suffer from a lack of fuel, medical supplies, and clean water.

Sally Abi Khalil, Oxfam's Middle East and North Africa Director, said: "These staggering figures are both appalling and heartbreaking. Influential actors in the international community have not only failed to hold Israel to account, they are also complicit in the atrocities by continuing to unconditionally supply it with arms. It will take generations to recover from the devastating impacts of this war and there is still no ceasefire in sight.

"Our colleagues and partners are displaced themselves, yet every day are doing their utmost to respond to this humanitarian catastrophe. It's unprecedented on so many levels - the fastest acceleration into famine, the reemergence of polio, the utter devastation of daily life faced by the entire population. Israel's free pass for impunity and exemption from international humanitarian law must end – we cannot allow the relentless horror and suffering to continue."

Dr Umaiye Khamash, director of Oxfam partner Juzoor, which is supporting hundreds of thousands of people in more than 90 shelters and health points across Gaza said: "The past year has had a devastating impact with women bearing a double burden. Many have suddenly become the heads of their households, navigating survival and care in the midst of destruction. Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers have faced immense difficulties, including from the collapse in healthcare services.

"For children, the trauma is equally profound. Over 25,000 children have either lost a parent or become orphans, leaving them in deep emotional distress. Most children are grappling with anxiety and severe physical injuries, with many having lost limbs."

In the occupied West Bank, the unprecedented escalation and levels of violence are raising concerns that serious violations of international law and war crimes are being committed. Since last October, more than 680 Palestinians have been killed either by Israeli settler or military violence. More than a thousand settler attacks on Palestinians have been recorded, with direct attacks on agricultural land resulting in the destruction of crops, irrigation systems and greenhouses, including internationally-funded and Oxfam-supported projects. The Israeli military has forced the demolition of more than 2,000 Palestinian homes with massive damage to public infrastructure including roads.

Oxfam is calling for an immediate, permanent ceasefire, the release of all hostages and unlawfully detained Palestinians, an end to all lethal arms sales to Israel and full access across Gaza for humanitarian aid. In light of the recent International Court of Justice advisory opinion and in order to avoid complicity, third states must do everything in their power to bring an immediate end to the illegal Israeli occupation, the removal of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and reparations paid, including restitution, rehabilitation, and compensation for affected communities.

Ends

For interviews with spokespeople, please contact Lucy Brown at lucyb@oxfam.org.au or 0478 190 099.

Notes to editor

The data is available to journalists upon request

The number of women directly killed by conflict comparison has been taken from The Small Arms Survey Global Violent Deaths database, which contains the latest data available from 2004 to 2021. It includes data and estimates on direct conflict deaths disaggregated by gender of the victims. The previous highest number of women estimated to be killed in a conflict in one year was 2,647 in Iraq in 2016. Even accounting for potential under-reporting of women killed in other conflicts, the death toll in Gaza is much higher. It was compared with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) cumulative impact [report](#) on 25 September, sourced from the Ministry of Health in Gaza. Of

41,495 people killed, 34,344 have been identified to 31 August. 6,297 are women and 11,355 children. The Ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths

A [report](#) by the organisation Every Casualty Counts examined the information available on the deaths of 11,420 children in the Syria conflict from March 2011 to the end of August 2013 (approximately 29 months), which averages 394 children a month - 4,725 children a year

The [Children and Armed Conflict reports](#) issued by the Secretary General of the UN started reporting consistently on grave violations against children in 2006, with annual data for the previous year. The UN reports contain both verified and estimated figures for the number of children killed each year, but even when Oxfam factored in the most extreme assumptions for each estimation and checked additional data sources, the number of children killed in Gaza far exceeds any single year for children killed in all conflicts. These figures were then compared with the OCHA [report](#)

The total number of children killed in Gaza and the West Bank according to the UN Children and Armed Conflict reports between 2005 and 2022 is 2,304. 11,355 children have been killed so far this year, which is 4.9 times more, when compared with the OCHA [report](#)

There is limited, verified data available for the number of women and children killed directly by conflict during the Tigray civil war (November 2020 – November 2022) in northern Ethiopia. While there are some women fatalities for Ethiopia within The Small Arms Survey report, the most referenced data is from the [University of Ghent](#) which estimates between 300,000 to 600,000 civilian deaths over a two-year period. Of the well-documented 3,074 deaths, 8 per cent were women and 9 per cent children (under 20 years of age). The study [estimates](#) that 10 per cent of total deaths were victims of bombing and massacres, 30 per cent due to lack of healthcare and 60 per cent due to starvation

Human Rights Watch published [analysis](#) of the 7 October 2023 attacks and [Times of Israel](#) documented the number of Israeli child hostages

Action On Armed Violence (AOAV) records, investigates and disseminates evidence of armed violence against civilians worldwide. Data from 7 October to 23 September inclusive showed 2,854 Israeli explosive strikes – including airstrikes, missiles and tank shelling – with information including the date, event description, number of civilians killed and location. AOAV uses English-language media reports to capture the information. An AOAV [report](#) last year found that English-language media underreports the number of casualties caused by specific incidents of explosive weapons use, capturing only roughly a third of the actual civilian deaths from specific explosive incidents in Gaza.

[Counting the dead in Gaza: difficult but essential](#) was published in The Lancet in July this year, studying indirect deaths in Gaza due to the war