

**Declaration Issued by the Factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Forces of the
Palestinian National Coalition in Lebanon**

On the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict and Violence

First, it must be emphasized that the Israeli occupation of Palestine is at the root of the Palestinian people's plight and the displacement of nearly two-thirds of the population across the countries of exile and refuge. The Israeli occupation authorities still deny the Palestinian people their legitimate rights despite them being recognized by international legitimacy. This places on the international community a moral, political, legal, and humanitarian responsibility toward the Palestinian people to end their suffering by putting an end to Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and secure for Palestinian refugees their right to return to the land and homes they were forced to leave in 1948.

Palestinian refugees living forcibly on Lebanese soil are an integral part of the Palestinian community. They remain committed to their legitimate right to keep up the struggle to attain the goals of the Palestinian people by all available means appropriate to the circumstances of Palestinian strife, in keeping with international conventions and instruments, while respecting the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon.

Palestinians have been living in Lebanon under dire economic and social conditions in all respects, whether in terms of health, living standards, or education. Deprived of their civil and social rights, as well as the right to own property, and with the cutback in United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) services, they have been reduced to indigence. In fact, numerous studies have shown that 40% of Palestinians live below the poverty line.

We, the members of national and Islamic Palestinian factions and forces in Lebanon, consider individual arms, held in the camps in agreement with the Lebanese State following the handover of heavy artillery in 1990, as serving the Palestinian liberation project. Moreover, these arms guarantee the protection and defense of Palestinian refugee camps against any potential Israeli aggression. We are committed to the efforts to prohibit and criminalize the use of arms in the streets of Palestinian refugee camps for resolving internal differences among national and Islamic factions and forces. This can only result in negative consequences that would come at a great cost to civilian lives and interests, and terrorize children and traumatize them both physically and psychologically. Not only does this violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it fails to serve the best interests of the Palestinian people.

Our political platforms and organizational mechanisms do not legitimize the targeting or recruitment of children in armed action. It is our conviction and belief that we, the Palestinian community, are the most adversely affected by any failure to apply international conventions on human rights, in particular those relating to the protection and safety of children in times of armed conflict. Israel is doing more than enough in this regard as it is: killing and harassing and arbitrarily detaining civilians, especially children. We, the members of national and Islamic Palestinian factions and forces, affirm our adherence and pledge our commitment to the following declaration, in alignment with and in the spirit of the National Code of Honor which national and Islamic forces in Palestine signed on May 4th, 2010, reflecting the essence of the *Deed of Commitment under Geneva Call for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict*:

- I. We affirm our commitment to respecting all international covenants and conventions on human rights, notably those international legal instruments that protect the lives and ensure the safety of children in situations of conflict/armed violence, especially the Geneva Convention IV, the two Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We will strive to strengthen the rules and standards for the protection of children and to undertake all necessary measures to ensure the protection and care of children affected by armed conflict/violence.
- II. We condemn the recruitment of children in all forms of armed action, regardless of its aims. We similarly condemn the targeting of civilians and their property, of educational and health institutions, and any other public utilities in the course of armed conflict within the camps.
- III. We believe that the participation of children in armed conflict/violence constitutes a grave violation of their fundamental rights, whether as individuals or groups. It is therefore imperative to raise public awareness of children's rights, to implement legal provisions in this regard, and to promote the principle of the best interests of the child. All this requires increased awareness to end the recruitment, incitement, or involvement of children in armed conflict/violence.
- IV. We pledge to employ all practically available means to ensure that children under eighteen years of age do not directly participate in military action.
- V. We assert that the effective protection of children from the impact of armed conflict is achieved through our unconditional commitment to acknowledging that children have no part to play in armed conflict.

- VI. Laying stress on the non-involvement of children in armed conflict to ensure their protection, we, nonetheless, confirm their right to participate in the political life of their communities, through engagement in student organizations and unions to allow them to practice their rights freely, responsibly, and equally.
- VII. We call on all concerned parties to develop measures that aim to promote the physical, psychological, and emotional healing, as well as the social integration, of children affected by armed conflict/violence.

We, the undersigned, declare our absolute willingness to cooperate with all concerned parties to ensure the implementation of the provisions of the present declaration and the development of mechanisms that guarantee implementation.

17/12/2013

Myeh wa Myeh Refugee Camp

Signed:

Secretary of the PLO factions in Lebanon
Fathi Abu Al-Ardat

Secretary of Palestinian Coalition forces in Lebanon
Abu Imad Ramez