Children's rights must be put first

Joint Press statement from Jamie McGoldrick, Humanitarian Coordinator in the occupied Palestinian territory, James Heenan, Head of OHCHR in oPt and Genevieve Boutin, UNICEF Special Representative in State of Palestine

JERUSALEM, 1 August 2018 - We are deeply concerned that children's rights continue to be violated, and demand that concrete, immediate steps be taken to allow children to live free of fear and to realize all their rights.

Despite continuous warnings and appeals by the United Nations and others to put the protection of children first, week after week, reports emerge from the Gaza Strip and other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory of children killed or seriously injured, some as young as 11. Meanwhile, children in Israel are exposed to fear, trauma, and grave injuries. This month alone, seven Palestinian children were killed by live ammunition and shelling from Israel. Two Israeli girls aged 14 and 15 also reportedly sustained injuries from rockets and mortar shells indiscriminately launched by Palestinian armed groups towards Israel.

Since the start of the demonstrations against deteriorating living conditions in Gaza on 30 March 2018 at the Israel – Gaza fence, 26 Palestinian children have been killed, 21 during the demonstrations, and five others were killed by Israeli shelling or outside the context of demonstrations. In the same period, hundreds more children have been injured by live ammunition. A number of these children will suffer lifelong disabilities, including as a result of the amputation of limbs. Thousands are in need of urgent psychosocial assistance, specialised medical care, and support for their rehabilitation.

All over the occupied Palestinian territory, but particularly in the Gaza Strip, we see children robbed of every right. Families cope with four hours of electricity per day in the sweltering heat. Clean drinking water is expensive and hard to find. The start of the school year in one month will be very difficult for tens of thousands of families who cannot afford basic school supplies.

We deplore the too often cynical use of children in political rhetoric and propaganda on all sides. Of particular concern was last week's call by the organizing committee for "The

Great March of Return” for Palestinians to demonstrate under the banner of "the Friday of our Child Martyrs" and the reported exposure of children to violence. Children should never be the target of violence and must not be put at risk of violence nor encouraged to participate in violence.

We call on Israel, as well as the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas authorities in Gaza to put children’s rights ahead of any other considerations and to take immediate steps to alleviate their suffering. Respecting the rights of children and refraining from instrumentalizing their plight should be a priority for all. This context is not an exception.