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4TH DISTRICT, MINNESOTA



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UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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June 1, 2015

Dear Colleague:

The human rights of children here at home and around the world must be protected. When there are clear examples of state action that endangers the human rights of children the American people expect Congress to speak up and demand action.

I am requesting colleagues to join me in a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry urging the Department of State to make the human rights of Palestinian children a priority in our bilateral relationship with the Government of Israel. As an ally and the top recipient of U.S. foreign assistance, Congress and the American people should have every expectation that Israel respects and protects the rights of Palestinian children under their control.

Over the past decade at least seven thousand Palestinian children living in the occupied West Bank have been arrested, detained and subject to ill-treatment by Israeli security forces. In 2013 UNICEF conducted a detailed analysis as a result of reports concerning cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system. The troubling results were highlighted in UNICEF's report "*Children in Israeli Military Detention: Observations and Recommendations.*"

In February 2015 UNICEF issued a bulletin regarding their on-going dialogue with Israeli authorities regarding the rights of children in military detention. While dialogue is a positive step, Palestinian children continue to be arrested and detained in a military system that violates their basic human rights. The attached letter to Secretary Kerry outlines the concern and urges diplomatic action from the State Department.

To join the letter to Secretary Kerry please contact Michelle Myers at 5-6631 (michelle.myers@mail.house.gov) by June 12th COB.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Betty McCollum".

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

<DATE>

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

In 2013 the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) issued a profoundly disturbing report entitled "***Children in Israeli Military Detention: Observations and Recommendations.***" The report was in response to the estimated seven thousand Palestinian children, ages 12 to 17, from the Occupied West Bank who during the previous decade were subjected to arrest, detention, interrogation, and/or imprisonment by Israeli army, police, and security agents. UNICEF initiated their report in response to concerns regarding the cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and punishment of Palestinian children while in the Israeli military detention system.

Israel's military detention system targeting children is an anomaly in the world. In fact, UNICEF states, "It is understood that in no other country are children systematically tried by juvenile military courts that, by definition, fall short of providing the necessary guarantees to ensure respect for their rights."

Based on international law and treaties, the UNICEF report makes 38 recommendations for action by Israeli officials while offering the following conclusion:

"The ill treatment of children who come in contact with the military detention system appears to be widespread, systemic and institutionalized throughout the process, from the moment of arrest until a child's prosecution and eventual conviction and sentencing."

The security interests of Israel are clearly a national security priority of the United States Congress and the American people. There could be no more clear demonstration of American commitment to Israel than the more than \$3 billion of U.S. taxpayer funds which are invested annually to ensure the security of the Israeli people. However, respecting and defending the human rights of children, regardless of their ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality, is a fundamental American value, as well as a priority for all Americans, that cannot be ignored.

In 2014, Israel arrested a Palestinian-American child, a high school student from Tampa, Florida, who suffered physical violence and ill treatment while in an Israeli detention center. This incident highlights the fact that the state sponsored abuse of children cannot be tolerated and must be addressed.

Earlier this year UNICEF issued a follow-up report outlining areas where Israel has adapted, modified, or discussed changes to its system of military detention of Palestinian children. This is a positive step and a clear acknowledgement that legitimate human rights concerns exist. Progress to ensure Palestinian children's rights are not abused is in the interest of the U.S., Israel, and the Palestinian people.

Secretary Kerry, we urge the Department of State to elevate the human rights of Palestinian children to a priority status in our bilateral relationship with the Government of Israel. Furthermore, we fully expect the State Department to address the status Israel's military detention system's treatment of Palestinian children in its annual human rights report.

Your leadership to advance the rights of children is deeply appreciated.

Sincerely,

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Israel Held Boys, 7 and 12, Saying They Threw Stones

By DIAA HADID

RAMALLAH, West Bank — A 7-year-old Palestinian boy and his 12-year-old cousin, accused of throwing stones at an Israeli bus, were detained by Israeli security officials in East Jerusalem on Tuesday evening and interrogated for hours, relatives said Thursday.

The detention of the boys, Ahmad Zaatari and his cousin Mohammed Zaatari, was the latest example of Israel's crackdown on children, even the very young, accused of stone-throwing and other provocative activities.

The detentions have drawn criticism from human rights groups, which say they traumatize children, and accusations

Myra Noveck contributed reporting from Jerusalem.

that Israel pressures children for information.

Israeli security officials point out that rock-throwing can be dangerous, and even deadly. A 4-year-old Israeli girl, Adele Biton, died in February after being critically injured in a car accident caused by Palestinian rock throwers in 2013.

It is a widespread problem in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, where young Palestinians frequently hurl rocks at Israeli military and civilian vehicles. Many Palestinians see the action as a central weapon in their resistance to Israel's occupation.

There are no statistics available on the detention of children younger than 12 because they are usually released within a few hours. Brad Parker, a lawyer at Defense for Children International-Palestine, said the Israel Prisons

on Service counted 25 Palestinians aged 14 and 15 currently behind bars.

Mr. Parker said his organization estimated that 200 to 400 children younger than 12 were held each year in situations similar to Ahmad's.

"These really young cases have been cropping up more and more, but I wouldn't say it's a regular occurrence," he said.

Mahdi Zaatari, 44, Mohammed's father and Ahmad's uncle, said the boys had been playing outside their home in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Wadi Joz when they were picked up by plainclothes police officers around 7:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Micky Rosenfeld, a spokesman for the Israeli police, said Ahmad had been caught throwing stones at a bus but had no information on why Mohammed had been de-

tained.

Barakat Zaatari, Ahmad's grandfather, said the boy was too young to pose a threat. "A rock wouldn't fly a meter from his hand," he said.

Mahdi Zaatari said security officers arrived at the family's home shortly after picking up the boys, demanded the identification cards of the boys' fathers and then left. He said that the family had not been informed of the children's location and that relatives had gone searching station to station.

Around 10:30 p.m., Mr. Zaatari said, the police called and said the boys were at a police station on a main street in East Jerusalem. The family waited there until around 2:30 a.m. on Wednesday, when Ahmad was released. His uncle said Ahmad was terrified and had not been given anything to eat.

"They asked him: 'How do you want to die? Do you want to be a martyr?'" Mr. Zaatari said. "They asked him if he liked throwing stones and tried to get him to tell on the other children."

Mr. Rosenfeld said social workers and Ahmad's parents had been told of his detention, but he did not know how long it had taken to notify them.

Mr. Zaatari said Mohammed was held overnight and appeared in court on Wednesday on a charge of throwing stones. He was ordered to stay away from Jerusalem for three days. Mr. Zaatari and Mohammed are now staying in Tel Aviv.

Palestinian-American Teenager Returns Home After Beating

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JULY 17, 2014

TAMPA, Fla. — The [Palestinian](#)-American teenager who relatives say was beaten by the Israeli authorities returned home to Florida late Wednesday.

Tariq Abu Khdeir, 15, and his mother flew back to Tampa on a flight arriving from New York and were greeted by about 50 cheering supporters waving American and Palestinian flags. The Khdeirs had left [Israel](#) earlier in the day.

“I am only 15, but I will never think of freedom the same as I did two months ago,” Tariq said upon arrival at Tampa International Airport. “No child, Palestinian or Israeli, deserves to be killed.”

The teenager, who spoke only a few minutes, said prayers had helped him through his ordeal. He also said he could not wait to see his friends and go fishing.

Hassan Shibly, the teenager’s lawyer and the executive director of the Florida chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, had said Tariq suffered head trauma and received stitches on his face when beaten two weeks ago after being arrested during a protest. Supporters say Tariq’s beating was videotaped. The Israeli Justice Ministry has said that an investigation had been opened into the footage.

There were no immediately apparent signs of injuries to Tariq on his arrival.

The Israeli authorities released Tariq shortly after his arrest and sentenced him to nine days of house arrest while they investigated what they said was his participation in violent protests in East Jerusalem over the death of his cousin, Mohammed Abu Khdeir, 16. His family denied that he had participated in the protests. Palestinians suspect Mohammed Abu Khdeir was killed by Israeli extremists exacting revenge for the abduction and killings of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank last month.

Wiping tears from her eyes, his mother, Suha Khdeir, said Wednesday that the last two weeks had been a “nightmare.”

Friends and family have said Tariq went on a vacation to visit relatives he had not seen in about 10 years — not to be part of a conflict. They have described him as a good student who likes basketball, soccer and video games.

Tariq's arrest happened shortly before Israel attacked Gaza to stop Hamas members from launching rockets into its territory. Earlier on Wednesday, Israel and Hamas agreed to a five-hour United Nations brokered "humanitarian" pause to their nine-day-long battle, offering the most encouraging sign yet that the fierce fighting could come to an end. Israel's bombardment of Gaza has killed more than 200 Palestinians, including four boys struck on a beach Wednesday by shells fired from a navy ship.

Israeli Officer Charged in Assault

By ISABEL KERSHNER
SEPT. 10, 2014

JERUSALEM — A border police officer has been charged with assault after he was filmed beating a [Palestinian](#)-American teenager on the edges of a violent riot in East Jerusalem in July, the Israeli Ministry of Justice said Wednesday in a statement.

Tariq Abu Khdeir, 15, from Tampa, Fla., was spending the summer with relatives in Shuafat. He got caught up in violence that broke out after the [grisly killing](#) of his cousin Muhammad Abu Khdeir, 16, by Jewish extremists in revenge for the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli youths by Palestinian militants in the [West Bank](#).

The [footage of Tariq's beating](#) spread worldwide, prompting international outrage and a call by the State Department for a speedy and credible inquiry.

The officer, who was not named, chased Tariq, who was "masked, with a kaffiyeh wrapped around his head, and holding a wooden slingshot," according to the statement. After the youth was on the ground, and was not resisting arrest, the officer kicked and punched him in the head, face and upper body, the statement added.

Tariq, who was hospitalized and has since returned to the United States, said that he had only been watching the clashes. Several other members of the Abu Khdeir clan have since been detained by the Israeli authorities.