

# The Strategy of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in Israel for the Protection of the Palestina Children in Israel Palestine Conflict

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**Keywords:** Israel-Palestine, child protection, NGO, civil society

**Abstract:** In the context of elevating a hundred cases of human right violation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this research focuses on the strategy of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) in Israel which protected Palestinian children in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from 2009 to 2014. The objects of this research are the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), The Legal Center of Arab Minority Rights ('Adalah), and the Peres Center for Peace. The theories applied are the concept of non-governmental organization (NGO), international humanitarian law and peacebuilding concept. As a civil society, These 3 NGOs have conducted the effort to protect Palestinian children through public policy advocacy, international advocacy, and empowerment. This research utilizes qualitative method with a variety of relevant sources. The conclusion drawn from the analysis is that the efforts of the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), the Legal Center of Arab Minority Right ('Adalah), and Peres Center for Peace are the strategic steps of the civil society movement in the protection of Palestinian children.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

One of the conflicts that have a severe impact on children is the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. The conflict has been going on since 1920; it has raised hundreds of cases of human rights violations, especially regarding the protection of human rights of the minority. The authority of Palestine as a sovereign state since 2012 seemed to be failed in guaranteeing control over border areas, providing security to citizens, and preventing occupational territories (PCATI, 2010). Although international pressure on Israel increased along with the international recognition of Palestinian independence, the fact shows that the symbolic victory did not immediately end the cultural conflict that occurred between Israel and Palestine until now.

Every year, around 700 children of Palestinian children from the occupied West Bank are prosecuted in Israeli military courts with numerous reports of torture. More than 100 samples of statements collected by lawyers in 2009 explained that 69% of children were beaten and kicked, 49% was threatened, 14% was confined in a narrow prison, 12% was sexually abused, and 32% was

forced to sign a letter confession written in Hebrew, a language they do not understand (Shohib, 2013: 13). UNICEF in its report entitled Children in Israeli Military Prisoners in March 2013 stated that Israel was the only country that systematically tortured children. Also, Israel has proven to have committed cruel and inhumane acts in treating child detainees (UNICEF, 2013).

In accordance with Palestinian and international pressure to stop violating children's rights, in Israel there are several NGOs that are working on defending and protecting children's rights in the past 10 years, to name a few are Public Committee Against Torture (PCATI), the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights (Adalah), and the Peres Center for Peace. These three organizations have diverse roles for all residents including Israelis, Palestinians, immigrant workers and foreigners who are in Israeli territories and the Palestinian Occupied Territories, in order to protect them from violence and torture through interrogation and Israeli courts, as well as socializing peace values through various programs.

This study intends to explore and analyze the strategies of humanitarian NGOs such as PCATI, Adalah and the Peres Center for Peace in the

protection and empowerment of Palestinian children in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the author uses the concept of NGOs, because based on the classification, PCATI, 'Adalah and The Peres Center for Peace can be categorized as a humanitarian NGO that moves against acts of violence and torture in Israel. Canadian human rights expert Laurie Wiseberg argues that humanitarian NGOs are non-governmental organizations that devote their every movement to uphold human rights protection. They are independent of government and political groups that have a stronger political interest and power (Wiseberg quoted in Dianne, 1996: 112).

One of the goals of NGOs is to alleviate human suffering stemming from political, ethnic, religious and other pressures that occur in conflict. NGOs also have a role in minimizing conflict escalation by facilitating dialogue between the parties involved (Aall, 2005: 105).

Humanitarian action has four basic principles, namely: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. The principle of humanity means that this action is carried out purely to help and protect people from suffering. The impartial principle means that this action is carried out without discrimination by ethnic origin, gender, nationality, political opinion, race or religion. While the principle of neutrality is defined as a state of not supporting both parties in disputes, competition, and war. Lastly, the independent principle means a separation from the military, economic, or political interests of certain groups (Brubacher, 2003).

To explain the hundreds of violations committed by Israel, the author uses the concept of international humanitarian law as a primary reference for humanitarian law throughout the world. According to Jean Pictet,

The international humanitarian law in the wide sense is constitutional legal provision, whether written or customary, ensuring personal respect and wellbeing (Pictet, 1966: 455).

International Humanitarian Law regulates two essential things; the first is to protect people or objects that are not directly involved in conflict or war, and the second is to regulate the specific rules of war (conduct of hostility). In this case, the author focuses on implementing the first goal of observing child protection in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Generally, children can be categorized as civilians who do not take part in hostilities. Children receive protection concerning personal respect, family rights, wealth and religious practice (Article 27 Geneva Convention IV 1949). Children should not receive the actions mentioned in Article 27 to Article 34 of the Geneva Convention IV which contains, conducting physical and spiritual coercion to obtain information, performing actions that cause physical suffering, collective punishment, intimidation, terrorism, robbery, taking reprisal, making them as hostage, performing actions that cause physical suffering or hostility towards the protected person.

The next concept is peacebuilding. Johan Galtung first used the term peacebuilding in his essay entitled *Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peace-making, and Peace-building*, in 1975. Galtung included the term peacebuilding, into three peaceful approaches namely peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding (Rahmawati, 2015:6). Peacebuilding is a process of implementing social, political and economic changes or reconstruction in order to create sustainable peace. Through the peacebuilding process, it is expected that negative peace (or the absence of violence) will turn into positive peace where the community feels social justice, economic prosperity and adequate political representation (Hermawan, 2007: 93).

Child protection and child protection efforts in conflict areas have been carried out with various strategies. The state does not always manage social change, but through the interaction of members of civil society with the help of roles from civil society organizations. The existence of a strong third party in civil society in Israel and Palestine will gradually create a pluralistic and democratic society and be able to respect international laws on child protection.

## 3 HUMAN RIGHT VIOLATION TOWARD PALESTINIAN CHILDREN

Children are the most vulnerable group in armed conflict. Beside being recruited as combatants, children are targeted directly and indirectly. As a result of decades of conflict, thousands of children have been killed, detained on terrorist charges for throwing stones, experiencing physical violence, recruited into spying, sexual harassment and other forms of violence.

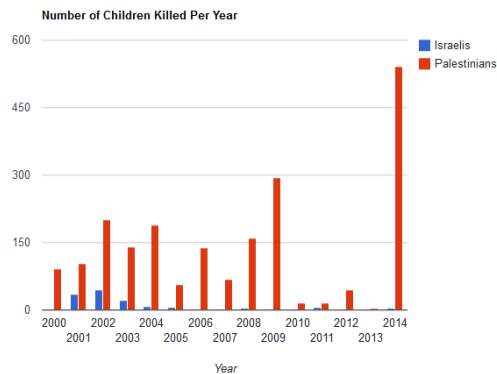


Diagram I. Number of Children Killed per Year in Israel-Palestinian Conflict.

Source: Remember These Children Data

From these data above, it concluded that years of conflict over the land has caused 133 Israeli children and 2,060 Palestinian children to be killed since september 2000. And the majority of them (Palestinian children) have been killed or attacked by violence (suddenly) when they do daily routine activities such as going to school, playing, shopping in their homes. (Cook, 2015).

Beside direct attacks, many Palestinian children become Israeli prisoners with various accusation. Every year, 500-700 Palestinian children (12-15 years old) are prosecuted in Israeli military courts with hundreds of reports of torture and ill-treatment (Dci-palestine, 2015). If calculated in total, since 2000 there were at least 8,000 Palestinian children aged 12-15 years who were detained and tried in the Israeli military detention system (Dci-palestine, 2010). Unicef in a report entitled Children in Israeli Military Detention in March 2013 stated that Israel was the only country that systematically tried children. Israel also proved to have committed cruel and inhumane acts in treating child custody (Unicef, 2013). This has greatly proven that Israel has violated the rights of children as stated in the 1989 child rights convention, international law and international humanitarian law. This condition is very concerning considering that Israel has ratified the convention on the rights of the child since 1991, but there is no implementation whatsoever in its legal actions in prosecuting child detention.

## 4 THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN PROTECTION IN PEACEBUILDING

Children are the most important part of nation. In its implementation, the child is a human resource for the development of a nation, determines the future of the generation. If the childhood of a nation's children is destroyed, the future of their country will be destroyed. Likewise children and young Palestinians who will become the future of the next Palestinian leaders. These armed conflict has taken away the joy of childhood and the rights of Palestinian children. Roles and responsibilities in providing protection for children including the fulfillment of children's rights and directing children to fulfill their obligations so that they can become qualified future generations. The condition of children who are physically and psychologically immature makes them need to get special treatment in order to grow and develop naturally both physically, mentally and spiritually. The fulfillment of children's rights and their protection in armed conflict is the responsibility of all parties of the family, the state / government community and even the international community (Kusdarini, 2005).

Some reasons why child protection must be truly implemented in armed conflict, are: (i) children are the weakest and vulnerable to any attack, because their physical and psychological conditions are immature and in the growth period (ii) The growth period of children will shape their mindset towards the social and the world in the future. Children who grow up in conflict situations tend to be affected and choose violence as a way to solve the problem. In other words, prevention of violence in childhood will build a culture of peace for its future. (iii) Children are the largest representation of civil society affected by the war. This is evidenced in the report of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics which indicates that children under the age of 18 constitute 53.3% of the total Palestinian civil society in the gaza strip and west bank (The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006). (iv) Concern for children is a fundamental foundation for building a society, in other words protecting children is the same as reducing escalation of conflict in society, improving community values and creating peace (machel, 2000). (v) The involvement of children in armed conflict is a violation of the basic ethics of society. Applying protection for children is a powerful way to bring the community back to fundamental and ethical values, including respecting

the dignity of children; (vi) The girls have special needs and face different threats in situations of armed conflict. Girls often become victims of sexual violence, rape, forced prostitution, and others. Therefore protection for girls must get more attention because the threat is higher than boys. And the last reason is (vii) Child protection in armed conflict is clear and firmly regulated by various international community legal commitments such as the convention on the rights of the child (articles 22, 38, 39), Geneva conventions, additional protocols and universal human rights declaration (Scott, 2013).

Prevention of all forms of violence against children in armed conflict and disseminating changes in social norms through the empowerment of children, youth and society are the main priorities for the contribution of child protection to peace building. Child protection can make a significant contribution to peace, when peacebuilding activities are incorporated into child protection programs at the community level, which involve the participation of children from both parties involved in the conflict, civil society and media collaboration.

## **5 CHILD PROTECTION NON GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS) IN ISRAEL**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has raised hundreds of human rights violations, international humanitarian law, and violations of children's rights. 50% of the Palestinian population who have been victims of Israeli military operations for years are children. As the next generation of the nation's future, the protection of children during armed conflict must be upheld and supported by cross-sectoral countries and all lines of society. This continues to spark the attention of local to international communities, through legal level advocacy movements to the "people to people" (P2P) civil society movement which is mostly carried out by civil society organizations such as NGOs. Local, regional and international NGOs are heavily involved in child protection and child advocacy in obtaining their rights in situations of conflict in Israeli Palestine. Among the dozens of humanitarian NGOs engaged in defending human rights, there are several NGOs whose programs focus on the protection of children, including the

Peres Center for Peace and Adalah (the Arab Minority Rights Law Center in Israel).

There is also an NGO called PCATI which is an independent human rights organization in Israel that was founded in 1990. This organization advocates for all residents including Israelis, Palestinians, immigrant workers and foreigners in Israeli territories and Palestinian Occupied Territories, in order to protect them from the treatment of violence and torture in interrogation, detention and the Israeli high court (PCATI, 2014). In general, the scope of PCATI's actions are as follows: legal advocacy, enhancing community participation, intensive lobbying and legislation, and also serves as the information centres.

Whereas Adalah is the only legal centre for the Arab minority in Israel. The name was taken from Arabic letter عدالة means "justice." This independent institution that was established in November 1996 was formed to promote and defend the rights of Palestinian Arabs in Israel, amounting to 1.2 million people, or 20% from the population, as well as the rights of Palestinians living in the occupied Palestinian territories. Adalah's scope includes Legal Advocacy, Civil Rights and Political Rights, Criminal Justice, Palestinian Occupational Territories, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Slightly different from the other two NGOs, the Peres Centre for Peace is a non-profit, non-political organization, as well as an NGO that fights for peace between Israel and Palestine, and between Jewish and Arab Israeli communities. The organization was founded in 1996 by former Israeli Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Shimon Peres. The NGO is engaged in various development programs and peace programs every year. Thousands of their program involve Jewish and Arab or Israeli and Palestinian communities consisting of children, women, youth, professional workers and others to meet together in the peace program every year. The programs are deliberately designed to provide more space for civil society to participate in building peace from the grassroots level actively. Some of the focus of the Peres Center for Peace activities are providing medical aid and health facilities, delivering peace education (sports, arts, and technology), assisting business and the environment. Peres Center for Peace is expected to be able to eliminate various obstacles, eliminate various fears, hold dialogues and build friendships, pave the way for peace between two different civil society backgrounds namely Israel and Palestine (Peres for Peace).

#### 4 NGO STRATEGIES IN ADVOCATING PUBLIC POLICY

Policy advocacy is a systematic and organized effort to influence and promote for policy changes that gradually take sides in society. Therefore, advocacy is more a social change effort through all channels and tools of democracy, political processes and legislation contained in the democratic system that applies in a country (Zastrow, 2014). PCATI and Adalah view that policy change can be realized, one of which is through a series of advocacy actions that are carried out in an argumentative, systematic and organized manner. The term institutional elite shows that the focus of policy advocacy is not always targeted at the government, but other parties who influence the policy system can also be the target of policy advocacy (Mosley, 2006: 19). For example, in 2014, Adalah sent two letters to the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Public Advocacy and the Attorney General to request a direct investigation to address the violations of international humanitarian law related to two different incidents in the Gaza Strip.

The growing influence of NGOs in the local to international conflict situation is caused by several factors, namely, globalization and the level of dependence between countries in the world. Globalization makes relations between countries even closer, emerging NGOs in Israel are able to become facilitators between humanitarian defenders in Europe and can be connected. NGO involvement in every meeting and conference that addresses the issue of child protection at the national to global level also makes the role of Israeli NGOs in the situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and other international conflicts are increasing.

A petition is also a form of a campaign strategy that includes education and mobilization efforts. Public education and mobilization tend to lead to forms that show community support in particular issues (Start and Hovland, 2004: 42).

Although founded by Israeli people, NGOs in Israel have carried out their humanitarian actions without much intervention from donors because they are based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. The principle of humanity means that this action is carried out purely to help and protect people from suffering. The impartial principle means that this action is carried out without discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, gender, nationality, political opinion, race or

religion. While the principle of neutrality is defined as a state of not supporting both parties in disputes, competition and war. And finally, the independent principle is separate from the military, economic, or political interests of certain groups (Brubacher, 2003).

This is evidenced by the fact that the journey of these three NGOs did not always get a good response from the Israeli government, but they persisted with their respective defense methods. In 2010, a bill was presented by the MK Likud to the Israeli parliament which specifically targeted anti-violence peace organizations in the Israeli territory to limit their funding from foreign governments. According to this bill, NGOs are not permitted to receive donations from foreign governments of more than 5000 US dollars, because they are considered to affect the political and policy discourse of the state of Israel (Shoulder, 2012). Previously, since 2010 the Israeli government has also attempted to delimit humanitarian NGOs that promote peace in the conflict area of NGOs in Israel by describing it as an anti-Israeli organization and called a traitor. This was responded quickly by the CEO of PCATI Dr. Ishai Menuchin, in his open letter mentioned in the previous discussion. PCATI asserted that it would continue to carry out humanitarian actions in various ways against Israeli violence. The threat of the proposed law will not deter other humanitarian activists. Non-violent NGOs established in Israel have integrity and neutrality in upholding human values in every policy. Neutrality and independence as NGOs that grow in conflict countries will indeed be tested by attacks from various parties involved in the conflict, especially the government.

NGO influence in public policy is also supported by media. The advancement of information and communication technology also strengthens these non-state actors who are able to survive and thrive to expand networks and support. NGOS in Israel builds networks between grassroots / grassroots organizations and publishes reports / press releases in the context of publications and campaigns through social media and the internet. PCATI itself has long working with 'Adalah and building networks with Israeli and Palestinian NGOs such as the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Physician for Human Rights, B'Tselem, the Public Center for Human Rights (PCHR) of Palestine, and Defense for Children International (DCI) -Palestina and others. While the Peres Center for Peace, which has a lot of work in the realm of sports, collaborates with the Palestine Center for Conflict Resolution, FIFA (Football for Hope), The Jewish Federation, and

others. In addition, reports, press releases and social media campaigns in an effort to increase public awareness of the importance of protecting Palestinian children also continue to be encouraged. Several published reports include: reports on the Livni Halts Practice of Placing Detained on Palestinian Children in Outdoor Cages (Livni Requesting the Termination of Placement of Detainees of Children in Iron Cages) published by PCATI and Childhood is not a Privilege but a Right! (Childhood is not a Privilege but a Human Rights) in responding to Israel placing prisoners including children in an iron cage. (PCATI, 2014)

## **5 ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY**

In addition to public policy advocacy, these Israeli NGOs also collect international support in efforts to encourage the implementation of human rights, international humanitarian law, and the Convention on the Rights of the Children in the Israeli and Palestinian conflict areas. Protection of children's rights in situations of armed conflict includes the following 2 (aspects) which are, the involvement of children in military activity as combatants and children the victims of conflict (Majekodunmi, 1999). Children rights violations committed by Israel can be seen in several forms, the first is making children the target of attacks. As a result of years of conflict, children suffer not only physical violence and short-term trauma, but also the possibility of prolonged trauma, mental stress, and other psychological disorders until the victims enter adulthood. A study in the Gaza Strip and West Bank stated that Palestinian children living in an armed conflict environment are at high risk of suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is one type of ongoing trauma without an end (Sehwail, 2005); mental stress, and other psychological disorders (Qouta & El-Sarraj, 2004).

Since 2006, DCI-Palestine (2014) has documented several cases of recruitment of children as child soldiers by both parties, Israel and Palestine. Israel employs many child detainees as informants and spies. Israeli Shabak intelligence forces child detainees to be informants and spies to monitor Hamas and Fatah forces, some children who refuse to be trapped with videos of sexual abuse or other violence.

One of the essential things besides the attacks and recruitment of children in conflict is the arrest of children in prison, violence received as child custody, and demands in the Israeli High Court. It should be noted that Palestinian children who are systematically detained and held by the Israeli High Court have always experienced various violence and ill-treatment.

The next violation was the destruction of children's facilities such as health and education facilities. The right of the child to continue to enjoy education must be fulfilled by both parties to the dispute regardless of the difficulty of the situation, as guaranteed in Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights Children 1989. However, the fact that occurred was Israeli military operations in early 2014 destroyed 232 schools. The blockade carried out by the Israeli army also hampered learning materials such as books to enter Gaza (DCI-PS, 2014).

## **6 ANALYSIS OF NGOS EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES IN THE CONCEPT OF PEACEBUILDING IN CIVIL SOCIETY**

The strategy of empowering children is divided into several sectors, including health, education, sports, and skills training. In the health sector, the Peres Center for Peace has a special program for the protection of children's health during the conflict. The program has gathered more than 60 Palestinian and Israeli doctors to treat various diseases suffered by children.

In the education sector, Peres Center for Peace programs includes, Twinned Peace Sports Schools (TPSS) was released in 2002 to gather Jewish and Arab or Israeli and Palestinian children who are aged around 6-18 years. They create sports program and peace education to eliminate boundaries between them and instill attitude tolerance with each other (Peres for Peace, 2014). The organization also created an International Youth Exchange; long-term program provided for Israeli and Palestinian teenagers to conduct cultural and educational exchanges and vacation programs abroad. This program develops global friendship and tolerance among children.

While in the sports sector, the Peres Center for Peace focuses a lot on football, for example, the Mini-Mondial program, soccer matches initiated by the Peres Center for Peace for Israeli and Palestinian children every year. Israeli and Palestinian children train with local trainers twice a week and compete together once. Directly this program does not only train football skills but also reduces the sense of trauma and fear of children after conflict and changes the children's mindset about seeing each other regarding humanity. Sport is an international language, which does not need to be understood verbally. When everyone plays, all the differences disappear. With sport, they establish good communication and friendship.

Another program is, Football Village for Hope - This program provides Israeli and Palestinian children aged 10-14 years from remote villages with limited access to football holidays and training in the Israeli Kibbutz; AFL Peace Team - This program brings together Israeli and Palestinian youth through Australian Football (AFL) Foreign sports programs in the Middle East that provide training, dialogue to create strong football teams even though they come from different backgrounds, races or languages; Fair Play program, this program was developed by Street Football World in collaboration with Kickfair who believes that football plays a role in social change, as well as being a game full of responsibility, justice and tolerance between players.

To motivate Israeli and Palestinian children in the field of football, this NGO also held an International Sports Network program. This program is carried out to elevate the name of sport as a medium of peace and appoint international sports athletes to convey messages of peace to children. Also, by participating in international sports conferences and international sporting events, the Peres for Peace seeks to promote its vision and mission to foster international awareness of using sports as a medium to promote peace.

Through these various empowerment programs, children are expected to be able to restore the joy of their childhood, revive the spirit of learning and reinvigorate hopes for both nations that are even better. These programs are carried out to teach peace to children as future generations of the two nations involved in the conflict, planting tolerance and new views from each other regarding humanity. This people-to-people based strategy complements various agreements and policies from state building in creating solutions for the protection of the Palestinian children.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The existence of NGOs in Israel has become a significant initiative of the civil society in the participation of child protection efforts and the creation of peace conflicts between Israel and Palestine. Public Committee Against Torture (PCATI), the Arab Minority Rights Law Center and the Peres Center for Peace have collaborated with local and international partners to protect and empower Palestinian children who are affected by the conflict situations. By upholding the principle of NGO neutrality as a non-state actor engaged in the humanitarian field, these three NGOs have three strategic steps in efforts to protect Palestinian children in conflict, among others, advocacy strategies on public policy, international advocacy strategies, and empowerment strategies. In order to influence the rules and public policies of the Israeli government that commit various acts of violence against children, as well as the demands of children in the Israeli Military Court, public policy advocacy is carried out in various ways. Some of them included sending petitions and open letters to the government rejecting violence against Palestinian children during the operation and assisting children during the court process. The second strategy is international advocacy which is carried out to gather international support to encourage Israel to implement child protection rules that have been stated in international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. One of the international advocacy efforts is a collaboration of 'Adalah with the United Nations Children's Rights Committee in drafting demands addressed to Israel for committing acts of violence against children. While the third strategy is the empowerment strategy carried out for Palestinian children who are victims of war, who have lost much of their childhood fun due to armed conflict. Some of the empowerment programs are carried out in the education, sports, arts and technology sectors. The most popular empowerment program that is in high demand is the football.

The various obstacles faced by these three NGOs do not stop the protection of Palestinian children in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The existence of international support related to the upholding of human rights and the protection of children has encouraged various efforts promoted through this civil society movement.

As a continuation of academic learning, this thesis hopes that further research can develop and explore more motivation and NGO strategies or civil

society movements in other fields, such as protection of women and other civilians, or see how child protection is carried out by a number of non-governmental organizations such as the ICRC, or other international NGOs. The study is considered necessary to compare how the output obtained through the protection mechanism and assistance that did not provided by the state.

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