

Occupied Childhoods:

Impact of the actions of Israeli soldiers on Palestinian children in H2 during February, March and April 2013



Documentation of the mistreatment of children, compiled by international observer teams in the Old City and H2 (occupied) neighborhoods of Hebron.

Christian Peacemaker Teams Palestine

The recent mass arrest of 27 Palestinian children by Israeli soldiers on March 20, 2013 is a shocking example of the violation of children's rights in H2 (the portion of Hebron under Israeli Military control) in and near the Old City neighborhood of Hebron. Sadly the event is not an isolated incident. The suddenness of the arrest and the fact that it was not precipitated by a specific incident but was instead an attempt to round up as many children as possible in order to question them make the incident particularly egregious. Unfortunately children living in H2 are subject to experiences which violate their rights as children on a daily basis. Since the start of February human rights workers in Hebron have witnessed and documented 47 detentions and/or arrests of children age fifteen and under by Israeli soldiers. A UNICEF document released in February, 2013 describes the arrest, interrogation and detention by the Israeli army, police and security agents of approximately 700 Palestinian children aged 12 to 17 each year, throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

The following report documents incidents in H2 which were witnessed by international human rights workers during February, March and early April of 2013. It contains *only* the incidents during which internationals were present and able to provide documentation. Children living and attending school in H2 experience daily interruption of their right to access education, to move freely, to play, to access their communities and to be free from intimidation. The great majority of incidents in which soldiers harass or intimidate children are witnessed only by the children and the soldiers involved.

On multiple occasions during this period internationals observed soldiers detaining and questioning children in the street, inside checkpoints, inside buildings, in the cemetery and in front of schools. In clear violation of international law these detained children were not provided with legal counsel, and were held without a parent or legal guardian present. In some cases they were handcuffed, blindfolded, transported, and confined inside checkpoint containers.

Internationals monitoring checkpoints near schools in the Old City have witnessed the persistent violation of the right of children in H2 to freely access education. Human rights workers routinely see soldiers searching the schoolbags of children, detaining children who are on their way to school, practicing military exercises with weapons while children are present, stopping and questioning children as they pass through checkpoints on their way to school, requiring children to identify people in photographs and detaining children at checkpoints. Soldiers frequently stop, search and detain teachers and school administrators as they walk through checkpoints to work, even though the teachers pass through the same checkpoints to the same schools each day and are well known to the soldiers. On some occasions teachers are held long enough to cause the school day to begin late.

Palestinian children living in H2 are experiencing what can only be described as a human rights crisis. Their treatment by soldiers constitutes an inexcusable violation of international law, which clearly holds state parties responsible for assuring the rights of children as defined by Article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.
- Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family.
- Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.

Human rights workers in Hebron call upon Duty Bearers to assure the human rights of children are respected. As an Occupying Power the State of Israel is responsible for abiding by international law and for protecting the specific rights of children. It is the duty of the State to police its own military, and assure that soldiers stationed in civilian neighborhoods are informed and respectful of the rights of children.

In order to address the critical nature of the crisis faced by children in Hebron, human rights workers in call upon relevant UN agencies and NGOs to carry out their mandate by providing protection for children, and to pressure the State of Israel to change its policy vis-a-vis children in the Old City and H2.

Documented violations against children in Hebron, OPT:



Soldiers detain two boys at checkpoint 56,

February 4: Soldiers at the Mosque checkpoint turnstile searched 10 teachers between 7AM and 8AM as they came out of the Old City to their schools.

February 7: Between 7AM and 8AM soldiers at the Mosque checkpoint checked three adult ID's and held one teacher and one other adult for more than 15 minutes.

February 15: Soldiers detained two boys ages 14 and 15, at checkpoint 56 for 25 minutes. The soldiers accused them of throwing bottles or Molotov cocktails at the checkpoint. The police arrived and took their names and photos of their faces. Both boys were released from detention after 25 min at the checkpoint.



Soldiers at checkpoint 56 detain boy inside container for one hour on March 18Two boys detained for 25 minutes and released at checkpoint 56 February 15.

February 18: The principal of Ibrahim School for Boys detained at Qitoun checkpoint before school. Jaafreh was present at the checkpoint, as he is most mornings, making sure that his students made their way through Qitoun checkpoint and hurrying them along to school. Jaafreh is well known to both CPT and the soldiers at the checkpoint, and he was not in fact passing through the checkpoint, but on this particular morning soldiers approached him and demanded to check his ID. The soldiers held Jaafreh at the checkpoint and did not allow him to return to his school until after the school day had begun.

February 18: Soldiers at the Mosque checkpoint searched 11 student schoolbags between 7 and 8AM

February 19: Soldiers at Qitoun checkpoint conducted a military training as children were passing through between 7AM and 8AM to go to school. Soldiers stopped one student after he came through the checkpoint metal detector, asked him to come closer to where the soldiers were standing and questioned him briefly.



Soldiers prevent about 20 children from coming through the Qitoun checkpoint after one or 2 children threw stones, February 24.



The principal of Ibrahim Boys School in the Old City was detained by soldiers on Feb. 18 as he monitored his students coming to school.

February 24: Soldiers closed Qitoun checkpoint before school.

At around 7:45AM children outside of Qitoun checkpoint threw some stones over the gate. Soldiers closed the checkpoint while other children were trying to come through. About 5 children went around the checkpoint and came through without going through the metal detector.

February 24: Soldiers stopped two boys on their way to school near the Ibrahim School at 8.45AM. They detained them briefly and questioned them.

February 28: Soldiers stopped children and interrogated them as they passed Qitoun checkpoint on their way to school. Between 7AM and 8AM soldiers at Qitoun checkpoint stopped 10 students and questioned them. One soldier picked up a rock and showed it to the children as he asked them if they had thrown rocks during the recent clashes. Soldiers also stopped two boys who were taking a tire to the Ibrahim boy's school for a school project. The soldiers took photos of the boys. A teacher from the Ibrahim School who was standing at the checkpoint heard the soldiers say to the boys in Hebrew that if any tires were burned they would be blamed.

March 3: Between 7AM and 8AM soldiers at the Qitoun checkpoint searched the schoolbags of 20 children as they came through to go to school. At the Mosque checkpoint, one soldier insulted a mother who was walking with a student to school, calling the student's mother a whore.

March 5: Between 7AM and 8AM soldiers at the Qitoun checkpoint searched the schoolbags of 6 students. They stopped one older student who was smoking and refused to let him pass through the checkpoint until he put out the cigarette.

March 5: Between 7AM and 8AM soldiers at both Qitoun checkpoint and the Mosque checkpoint did a military training in which they pointed rifles at students and others in the area.

March 12: Extended military training slows family access through checkpoint 56. At around 4PM Israeli soldiers, police, ambulance and border police conducted a very large training exercise. Internationals counted 18 vehicles. Soldiers closed off the street near the Mosque checkpoint, and Qitoun checkpoint was very difficult for people to access. The exercise included the loading of "injured victims" into ambulances, and soldiers aimed their weapons, crouching and running between vehicles and buildings. Children and families were present throughout trying to go about normal business but many were forced to stand and wait because of the closed road and difficulty passing through the checkpoint. As a result many children watched the training.



Soldiers stop children on their way to school to search schoolbags at Qitoun checkpoint between 7 and 8 am



Children and family blocked by military training exercise march 12 at Qitoun checkpoint.



Children make their way through a military training exercise in their H2 neighborhood march 12

March 13: Between 7AM and 8AM soldiers at the Mosque checkpoint held one teacher for 10 minutes and searched his bag twice.

March 15: Soldiers arrested 2 boys – estimated ages 9 and 11 – during clashes near Bab al Zeweyya. Around 3PM soldiers detained one adult man and two boys, aged around 9 and 11 in H1, near checkpoint 56. The soldiers handcuffed both boys with zip ties and also handcuffed and blindfolded the adult. They then held all three inside the closed checkpoint cabin with several soldiers for one hour. During this time soldiers outside the cabin denied access to internationals. After around an hour the soldiers placed all three detainees in a military jeep and took them to the police station. During the demonstration soldiers entered homes and used teargas and rubber bullets, wounding one international.



Child held by soldiers handcuffed inside closed checkpoint container for 1 ½ hours, March 15.



Soldiers hold child inside checkpoint container at checkpoint 56 on March 15.

View **video** of incident at:

www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ng_xqfs3YZM



March 18: Between 7AM and 8AM as children were coming through the checkpoint to school, soldiers at both Qitoun checkpoint and the Mosque checkpoint held a military training in which they practiced aiming their weapons while children were present.

March 18: Child detained inside the soldier’s section of checkpoint 56. At 8:10, as children were coming through the checkpoint to school two soldiers detained a child inside the container. At first there were two soldiers inside with the child, until international activists intervened, at which point one soldier moved outside to prevent access to the child. For an hour soldiers denied that there was a child inside and would not allow anyone access, including the boy’s uncle. The boy’s uncle eventually saw the boy by looking through the small window. After one hour soldiers transferred the child to a jeep and took him to the police station.

March 20: On the morning of March 20 Israeli soldiers in Hebron arrested 27 children, age seven to 16, who were on their way to five schools near the Old City.

The principal of the Hebron Public School was standing in front of the gate to his school at 7:30 am while children arrived at his school and walked by on their way to four other schools nearby. The principal reported that about 22 soldiers came out of the alley across from the school and began taking children from the street. Students who attend these schools pass through checkpoints each day and in some cases must pass two checkpoints in order to reach school. In recent weeks there were several clashes between soldiers and children but there were no arrests.

The soldiers began to take children immediately, without speaking with the Principal or the children. Other adults arrived and tried to prevent the soldiers from taking the children but soldiers pulled the children away. They arrested 27 students, some as young as seven. Eighteen of the children were under the age of 12 and thus too young to be legally charged with a crime. The soldiers forced the children to walk to checkpoint 29 and put them into jeeps. The children said that the soldiers were violent as they forced them into the jeeps and some of the students were injured.

The soldiers drove most of the children to the civil police station near the Ibrahim Mosque and questioned them. These children were held with adults who were in custody at the police station. They did not have a lawyer, parents or teachers present with them. Soldiers and police did not call their parents or the school. Teachers from the school came to the police station but were not allowed in. Soldiers told the teachers that they were checking the children against photographs and would release the children whose photos they did not have. (For several weeks prior to the incident internationals observed soldiers at checkpoints asking children about photos on a camera, sometimes detaining them at checkpoint 56 as they walked to school and making them look at photos on a camera before allowing them to pass through.)

By 2PM soldiers had released the children who were under 12 but continued to detain those who were between the ages of 13 and 16. The soldiers took these children to the Jabarah and Junied military stations.

All of the students were questioned multiple times without any family, lawyers or teachers present. They were with adult prisoners while they were in military custody. A Palestinian adult who was detained in the police station when the children were brought in reported that they were handcuffed and blindfolded.

Two of the children, age 15, who attend the Ibrahim School, were taken from in front of the Hebron public school as they passed by on their way to the Ibrahim School. Obaida, one of the children who attend the Ibrahim School said, "We were passing to go to our school and they arrested us. The soldiers pushed us into the jeep, and then they took us away from the school checkpoint. They hit me on my knee. Then the commander came and talked with them in Hebrew. The commander slapped me and my friend on the face and let us go" Soldiers released these two students from the road above checkpoint 29. Ahmad, age 14, and a student at Hebron public school, said "I was in a small store with my friend on our way to school. When we came out of the market to go to our school they grabbed us from behind, took us to the checkpoint 29, then pushed us into the jeep. They took us to the first police station (Jababrah), then to another one (Junied). They questioned us, and took our finger prints. I was there from 7:30AM-7:00PM." These students



were transported and questioned multiple times without parents, a lawyer or teachers present and without the permission of a parent or guardian.

Late in the day soldiers released most of the students. They took seven of them to Kyriat Arba police station, where they released two. Five children were taken to Gush Etzion and Ofer military prison. Three of them had a court appearance on March 28. The two others were released after three days when their parents pay the bails. Over the next several days all families paid large sums and the children are all now free on bail.



These five boys are among the 27 who were arrested on March 20 in Hebron.

The following is an account by Malik, one of the three children who were detained in Ofer, and his father. It describes Malik's arrest, his incarceration, and his father's nightmare journey to free him. Malik was sixteen when he was arrested on March 20.

After detaining him for a few hours at the police station close to Ibrahimi mosque, soldiers brought Malik, together with six other children, to the police station in Kiryat Arba Settlement. The children were each interrogated separately. The interrogator yelled at Malik and asked him why he threw stones. When he answered that he did not throw stones the interrogator called him a liar. After one hour of interrogation the police released two and transferred five children, including Malik, to Ofer Court. During the interrogation Malik was alone and extremely afraid, and eventually he agreed to say that he threw stones.

While Malik was being interrogated at Kiryat Arba police station he saw that the other children were blindfolded and handcuffed. Soldiers drove all of the children to Ofer but instead of bringing them all inside they made five of the children wait for three hours in a military vehicle while they interrogated Malik inside. Then the soldiers transported all of them to Gush Etzion prison where they spent the night. Gush Etzion is a prison for adults and does not have separate facilities for minors. The boys were given dinner at Gush Etzion but their handcuffs were not removed and they had to eat with their hands shackled. They were not able to see a lawyer or family member or guardian, and their families did not know where they were.

Next morning at 7AM Malik and the other four children were brought to Ofer with their hands and feet shackled. At three o'clock they were sent to Court. After court three of the children were sent to Ofer Prison. Malik and one other child were transported back to Gush Etzion. When they got there the soldiers at Gush Etzion did not know what to do with them, and Malik was taken back to Ofer Prison.



In Ofer he had to take off all his clothes and he was given a prisoners uniform. He shared the cell number 9 with adult prisoners. One of these adults gave Malik his mattress and slept on the ground.

Malik remained in prison for three days without access to a lawyer or his family. The Israeli military contacted Malik's father on the 22nd of March and told him to come to Gush Etzion with his ID. Malik's father went to Gush Etzion and paid a bail of 2000 NIS. After he made this payment a policeman told him that his son was not in Gush Etzion prison, and that he would have to go to Ofer. While he was driving to Ofer the policeman called and told him to come back to Gush Etzion. The police told Malik's father that he would have to sign a paper stating that Malik was accused of damage to Jewish property and would have a court date on September 11.

Malik's father returned to Ofer, where he had been told he could pick up his son. He waited there from 11AM until 4PM, when soldiers told him that his son was not at Ofer Prison. He then received a call from a taxi driver near Nablus. The driver told Malik's father that he had found Malik on the road, and that Malik was with him in the taxi. The soldiers had abandoned Malik on the road, far from home, outside a strange city. Malik's father told the driver: "I will pay anything you want. Please bring my son home."



Children detained by soldiers between Quortuba School and checkpoint 56 at about 11 AM, March 20.

and teachers came out of the Ibrahim Boys School and talked to the soldiers.

February: During the month of February between 7AM and 8AM on school days soldiers at the Qitoun checkpoint searched 23 student's bags. Soldiers at the Mosque checkpoint searched 18 student bags.

March: During the month of March between 7AM and 8AM soldiers at the Mosque checkpoint have searched 30 student schoolbags. Soldiers at the Qitoun checkpoint have searched 39 bags.

March 20: Soldiers stopped and detained about 8 elementary school children as they left Quortuba School. They made the children go with them to checkpoint 56.

March 21: Between 7AM and 8AM soldiers at Qitoun checkpoint checked five student school bags and made one boy remove his jacket so they could look at it as well.

March 21: At about 10AM, soldiers detained a boy (about 8 years old) who was passing from near the Mosque checkpoint past the Ibrahim School on a scooter. They held him for about 15 minutes but released him after several people stopped



Child held and questioned by soldiers in the street near the Ibrahim boys school. Internationals were present and saw the boy riding his scooter near the Mosque checkpoint. Soldiers followed him and detained him near the school.

March 21: Soldiers detained three elementary school boys on Shuhada Street. Soldiers stopped the boys near Qortuba School on the afternoon of March 21st, at about 3:30. They detained the boys in the street and then walked them to Checkpoint 56 and released them on the other side. One of the boys had an injured foot and was very frightened and crying.

View video of the incident at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=490965807623666&set=vb.271582992877955&type=2&theater>



March 25: Soldiers threatened a boy by holding a spray can near his face. At around 7:25AM a boy of about 12 years who has a problem with one eye walked into one of the metal barriers near the checkpoint at the bottom of the Mosque gate. A soldier grabbed the boy, pushed him up against the checkpoint building and threatened him with a can of spray held near his face. The vice principal of the Ibrahim School for boys was nearby and intervened. He spoke with the soldier, and the



Soldier threatens boy with a can of spray near his face while detaining him at the checkpoint below the Mosque gate.

soldier released the boy. Another boy who is about 8 years old was very close to the incident.

March 26: Soldiers detained a 15 year old boy for about one hour at Gilbert checkpoint. Internationals observing the incident noted that inside Gilbert checkpoint there is a poster with many pictures of boys' faces, possibly from CCTV footage. When internationals noticed the photos soldiers tried to hide them.



Soldiers check photos of boys while they detain a 15 year old at Gilbert checkpoint, March 26.

The soldiers called the police, who arrived after around 30 minutes and inspected the boy, comparing his face with the pictures. The police left shortly afterwards, seemingly not recognizing the boy, but the soldiers refused to allow the child to leave despite this. After ISM intervened, along with a Palestinian activist, he was eventually permitted to leave the checkpoint.

March 28: At about 10AM soldiers detained five boys aged 9-13. The boys had been buying food at the market and were walking in the Muslim cemetery next to Shuhada Street when they were detained by soldiers, who brought them to the military base just next to the cemetery on Shuhada Street. According to eye witnesses, the boys had done nothing. The soldiers blindfolded and handcuffed the boys outside the base and then brought them inside. They held the boys for about one hour.

At around 11:20AM the soldiers brought the boys out and walked them up Shuhada Street with blindfolds on. The soldiers took them to checkpoint 56 and released them on the other side of the checkpoint

April 1: At around 8:10AM a border police officer kicked a young boy. The boy was sitting on a wall near the car park by checkpoint 56 and the border police officer raised his leg and violently pushed his foot into the boy.

April 5: Soldiers detained a 10 year old boy and took him to the military base at Shuhada Street at 3:10PM. One soldier forced the boy to walk by gripping him by the neck. One soldier guessed that the boy was 9 years old. They held the boy for over one hour, then took him blindfolded to the road leading to Abraham's spring. They released him there. The boy began crying and told internationals he wanted to go home. A soldier told internationals, "We don't arrest normal people. They are not normal people."



April 5, soldiers detained a 10 year old boy and walked him blindfolded to the military base, detained him one hour, then walked him near Abraham's spring and released him.



March 26. Soldiers detained a 15 year old boy for about one hour at Gilbert checkpoint.



March 28 soldiers detained 5 boys who were walking in the Muslim cemetery next to Shuhada Street, then brought them inside the military base.

April 6: At around 5:30PM soldiers stormed the house of a family and took two young boys, aged nine and seven. The soldiers turned the house upside down. They blindfolded the boys and took them away to the military base police station on Shuhada Street. The father of the boys tried to go with them but the soldiers prevented him. The soldiers told OHCHR that the boys would be transferred to the Palestinian police at 7.30PM, but they did not arrive there until 9:45PM.

Many aspects of the above incidents are clear violations of international law, which clearly states the following:

Parents or legal guardians should be informed of the arrest of children within the shortest possible time thereafter, in a language understood by the child and the parents or legal guardians. (The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), article 9 (1) and (2); Beijing Rules, Rule 10.1).

All children should be free from compulsory self-incrimination, which includes the right to silence. 'Compulsory' should be interpreted broadly and not limited to physical force. The age of the child and the length of the interrogation, the child's lack of understanding and the fear of unknown consequences may all lead a child to give a confession that is not true. (Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) article 40(2)(b) (iv); CRC General Comment No. 10, paragraphs 56-58; Convention against Torture, article 15; ICCPR, article 14(3)(g) and (4); Geneva IV, article 31).

There must be independent scrutiny of the methods of interrogation of children. This should include the presence of a lawyer and relative or legal guardian and audio-visual recording of all interrogations involving children (CRC, art 40(2)(b)(ii) and (iv); CRC General Comment no. 10, para 58; ICCPT, art. 14(3)(b); HRC General Comment no. 20, para 11; HRC Concluding Observations, Israel (29 July 2010), ICCPR/C/ISR/CO/3, para 22; Convention against Torture, art. 2; UN Committee against Torture, General Comment No. 2, para 14, and Concluding Observations, Israel (14 May 2009), CAT/C/ISR/CO/4, paras 15, 16, 27 and 28).

Children should not be held with an adult population while in custody. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, parties should establish separate facilities for children deprived of their liberty, including distinct, child-centered staff, personnel, policies and practices.

Article 37 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child states that State Parties shall ensure the following:

(a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age;

(b) No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;

(c) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances;

(d) Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.

According to UNICEF, (*Children in Israeli Military Detention; Observations and Recommendations*, February 2013) approximately 700 Palestinian children aged 12 to 17 are arrested, interrogated and detained by the Israeli army, police and security agents each year in the OPT. In the past 10 years approximately 7000 children have been detained, interrogated, prosecuted and/or imprisoned within the Israeli military justice system. This is an average of two children each day.

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- <https://twitter.com/btselem/status/314395213185572864>

Aged eight, wearing a Mickey Mouse sweatshirt, and placed in Israeli custody

27 Palestinian children never made it to school this week; IDF troops lay in ambush for them on the streets of Hebron.

By Gideon Levy and Alex Levac | Mar.29, 2013 | 9:59 AM | 77



Ahmed Abu Rimaileh. The 8-year-old admits he cried when he was arrested. Photo by Alex Levac

We couldn't help ourselves: The sight of the young, newly released detainee drove us into a paroxysm of laughter. But the laughter quickly morphed into sad embarrassment. The detainee was a boy of 8, in second grade. When we met him this week, on the streets of Hebron, he was on his way to his grandfather's home. He wore a red sweatshirt emblazoned with an image of Mickey Mouse, and he had a shy smile. His mom had sent him to take something to Grandpa. Eight-year-old Ahmed Abu Rimaileh was not the youngest of the children, schoolbags on their backs, that Israel Defense Forces soldiers took into custody early on Wednesday, last week: His friend, Abdel Rahim, who was arrested with him, is only 7, and in first grade.

Twenty-seven Palestinian children never made it to school on that particular day. IDF troops lay in ambush for them from the early morning hours on the streets of the Hebron neighborhoods that are under the army's control, and arrested them indiscriminately. Only after they were in custody did the Israeli security forces examine the video footage they had in their possession, to see which of the youngsters had thrown stones at Checkpoint No. 160 earlier that morning, which separates their neighborhood from the settlers' quarter of the city. It was here, a few weeks ago, that IDF soldiers shot and killed a teenager, Mohammed Suleima, who was holding a pistol-shaped lighter.

Most of the young children were released within a few hours. The older ones were kept in detention for a few days, before being released on bail. One adult, who tried forcefully to prevent the arrest of a colleague's son, was brought to trial this week.

The fact that 18 of the children were under the age of 12, the age of criminal responsibility according to the 1971 Israeli Youth Law (Adjudication, Punishment and Methods of Treatment), was apparently of no interest to the IDF, the Israel Police or the Border Police. Nor was the severe report issued just two weeks earlier by the United Nations Children's Fund, which condemned Israel for arresting some 7,000 Palestinian children in the past decade.

"Ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized," the UNICEF report stated, and added, "In no other country are children systematically tried by juvenile military courts."

The Youth Law forbids the arrest of children under the age of 12. It also appears that the provision stipulating that older children must not be interrogated without the presence of their parents and their lawyer does not apply to Palestinian children.

A volunteer from the International Solidarity Movement, a pro-Palestinian activist group, who documented with a video camera the operation in which the children were arrested, forwarded the footage to B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, and B'Tselem gave it to us. (The video can be viewed on the B'Tselem website and on YouTube.) One soldier is seen spitting crudely on the ground, another actually carries the schoolbag of his little detainee - as though he were a babysitter who had come to escort the child home from school. The amateur photographer from the ISM was deported from Israel that same day, after she also had the temerity to take part in a demonstration in Hebron against the visit of President Barack Obama.

Indeed, the mass arrest of the youngsters took place on March 20, the day Obama arrived in Israel, and the day before he made his remarks about Palestinian children in Jerusalem. "Put yourselves in the Palestinians' shoes," the president told the Israelis.

From early that same morning, Palestinian residents of Hebron noticed dozens of Israeli soldiers taking up positions in the streets and on rooftops in the neighborhood. One frightened resident called B'Tselem fieldworker Manal al-Jaabari, to ask what was going on.

Divided by age

For his part, Ahmed Abu Rimaileh woke up at 7 that morning and, with the NIS 2 he received from his mother as pocket money, set out for school; sometimes he gets NIS 1.5, sometimes 2. He attends the Hadija Elementary School down the street. Adjacent to it are three other schools that are part of an educational complex, which is located a few hundred meters from the checkpoint.

His father, Yakub, is a construction worker. His mother, Hala, is now sitting with us in their home. On the way to school, Ahmed says he stopped at the corner grocery store and bought a packet of cookies for NIS 1, and kept the other shekel for recess. As he was about to leave the store, he relates, seven or eight other children suddenly came running in, some his age, some older. Hard on their heels were soldiers, who arrested all the children in the store.

One soldier ordered Ahmed to put the cookies in his schoolbag before grabbing him by the shoulder and hauling him toward the checkpoint. Ahmed says he was very scared. He also admits that he cried, though only a little. At the checkpoint, he and all the other detained youngsters were thrust into an army vehicle - 27 children in one vehicle, some sitting, some standing, according to Ahmed's description.

There were three soldiers with them in the vehicle. Some of the children were crying, and the soldiers told them to be quiet. One child was hit, Ahmed says. They were all taken to the nearby Israeli police station, next to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, where they were told to sit on the ground, in a closed courtyard. The

children above age 12 were separated from the younger ones and taken to the police station in Kiryat Arba and afterward to Ofer Prison, north of Jerusalem.

Ahmed Burkan, 13, was not released until the evening. Malik Srahana, also 13, was held in custody for three days at Ofer Prison before being released on NIS 2,000 bail. B'Tselem fieldworker Musa Abu Hashhash, who met with him immediately after his release, says the teenager showed signs of trauma.

According to a report transmitted by the International Red Cross to B'Tselem, 18 of the detained children were under the age of 12. They were kept in the courtyard, with a policeman guarding them for almost two hours. No one offered them food or water.

Children asked to go to the bathroom but were forbidden to do so, Ahmed recalls. The policeman asked who among them had thrown stones, but no one confessed. He then asked if they knew which children had thrown the stones and they named two of the older ones, who had been arrested and separated from them.

After a time, three jeeps arrived and took the younger group to Checkpoint 56, next to the settler neighborhood of Tel Rumeida. There the children were met by three Palestinian police "security coordination" jeeps, which took them to their police station. The Palestinian police gave them food and asked all those who had thrown stones to raise their hand. All the hands went up.

The parents were called to come to the station to collect the children. Ahmed's parents and those of four other youngsters did not show up. Those five children were driven home in a car of the Palestinian Ministry of Education. Their worried parents were waiting for them.

Hala says she is not angry at her son. She only asked him not to cry the next time he is arrested by soldiers. "We are used to it," she says, adding that her son had a dream about the arrest that night.

The IDF Spokesman's Office provided the following statement in response to a query from Haaretz: "Last Wednesday, March 20, 2013, Palestinian minors threw stones at a force that was manning the checkpoint in Hebron. An IDF force that waited in ambush close to the site caught the stone-throwers in action. The Palestinian minors were detained on the spot, and seven of them, who are above the age of 12, were taken for interrogation by the Israel Police. As the Israel Police interrogated the minors, the question about the non-presence of a parent/lawyer during the interrogation should be addressed to them."

The day after the incident, Ahmed did not want to go to school, but was persuaded by his parents to do so. For one day he was a hero among the children: Ahmed, the released detainee. He did not enter the classroom that day, staying instead in the principal's office. He wants to be a doctor when he grows up, like a few others in his extended family, he tells us. His mother says he is a good student and a good boy.

Ahmed has seven brothers and sisters. The five boys sleep in one room, on two beds and on mattresses on the floor. There is an old computer in the room, which is turned off; they do not have an Internet connection. Out in the street a young peddler, of the same age as Ahmed, can be heard hawking his wares. After school the boy sells halabi, a sweet homemade pastry oozing with oil, for half a shekel.

By Cellu Rozenberg | Mar.31,2013 | 2:56 AM |

The IDF must stop arresting children

The unbearable ease with which the IDF, police and Border Police arrest small children shows that Israel is blatantly flouting both UNICEF's report and its own laws.

Twenty-seven Palestinian children were ambushed and arrested by Israel Defense Forces soldiers in Hebron on March 20. Eighteen of them were less than 12 years old, the minimum age at which they can legally be held responsible for a crime.

This large-scale roundup was arbitrary. Soldiers arrested every child they saw on the street – including first- and second-graders no older than 7 or 8 – on suspicion of throwing stones at roadblock 160, which separates Palestinians from settlers.

Among them was 8-year-old Ahmed Abu Remeila, who was quoted by Gideon Levy in Haaretz on Friday as saying he was abducted by soldiers on his way to school from the grocery store, where he had bought himself a biscuit, and that he was held at the police station for almost two hours.

All 18 children under the age of 12 were eventually released, but their arrest was nevertheless utterly reprehensible. Under Israeli law, they should not have been arrested at all. In fact, the law forbids authorities from interrogating the older children as well, unless their parents and attorneys were present. This was not the case.

The arrests in Hebron were carried out some two weeks after the United Nations Children's Fund released a report severely castigating Israel for the ways it arrests and detains Palestinian children.

UNICEF, which cannot in any way be accused of being anti-Israel, determined that the mistreatment of Palestinian minors detained by Israel is "widespread, systematic and institutionalized."

"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," it declared.

According to UNICEF's report, Israel has, in the past decade, arrested no fewer than 7,000 Palestinian children – some 700 a year. They are usually arrested in the middle of the night, after their homes are violently broken into, taken from their beds, torn from their families and thrown into prison in extremely harsh conditions, in violation of international treaties signed by Israel.

The unbearable ease with which the IDF, police and Border Police arrest small children shows that Israel is blatantly flouting both UNICEF's report and its own laws.

Even if the problem of stone-throwing in the West Bank is getting worse, the IDF's chief of staff must put an immediate stop to this illegal, ignominious procedure.