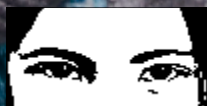


Terre des hommes Magazine

Courage

Gaza
**Growing up
in ruins**

West Bank
**Childhood under
occupation**





04

Report in Gaza

After the bombs fall, only silence lingers — the silence of grieving families, shattered neighbourhoods, and deeply traumatised children. While some debate peace on paper, those on the ground are still fighting simply to survive.



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Lidwien Wijchers, specialist in child protection in emergency situations, based in Gaza.



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Feletcia's diary

Feletcia Adeeab Saleh is a programme coordinator in the West Bank. In her diary, she shares her daily life under occupation.

♥ Thank you for acting alongside us!

Thank you for your solidarity with children around the world, throughout the year! Thanks to every donation, every bequest, every hour of volunteering and every partnership, millions of children can look forward to a better future. Because every child in the world has the right to be a child. It's that simple.

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“Whether alive or dead, the people of Gaza are deprived of dignity.”

Tomáš Bokor, Country Representative for Terre des hommes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Rebuilding childhood in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

When I visited Gaza in August 2025, I was in shock. To get there, I had to take a military road and cross this border that separates two worlds. On one side: a war zone, ruins, desperation, chaos. On the other: lush fields, orchards, and beautiful homes.

Once inside the Gaza Strip, I witnessed horror: thousands of starving people lining the road, their emaciated bodies clothed in dirty, worn-out clothes, ready to jump between cars in desperate search of food despite the danger. On the side of the road lay the body of an elderly man, abandoned without a dignified burial. Whether alive or dead, the people of Gaza are deprived of dignity. I have worked in Iraq and South Sudan, in some of the harshest humanitarian contexts, but I had never seen anything like this.

After two years of horror, there's nothing left in Gaza: people merely survive — amid rubble and garbage. Sewage runs through the streets as it did in the Middle Ages. Insects swarm, famine spreads, and disease follows. And it is the youngest and most vulnerable who pay the highest price. Since October 2023, a staggering 64,000 children have been killed or mutilated in the Gaza Strip, including at least 1000 infants. Those who survive go hungry, can't attend school anymore, and have all lost at least one family member.

Terre des hommes has been present for over 50 years in Gaza and has never stopped its work throughout the conflict, applying a simple yet vital approach to support families: providing food, water, and essential goods to those most in need, and creating safe spaces where children can play, escape, and forget — even for a few hours a day. On the next pages, you will see how their smiles return with the simplest game, the slightest attention. How their dreams come alive again — despite the rubble, the bombs, and death all around.

It is a tragic reality you will discover in this issue of Courage. Because peace agreement or not, everything has been destroyed. * Every Swiss franc can make a real difference in Gaza. That is why we need your support now more than ever.

* As these words are written in October 2025, a ceasefire has just been declared. The situation, however, remains fragile and could change at any moment.



Tomáš Bokor

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Growing up in ruins

'There are no words when it comes to Gaza,' say those who have gone beyond its gates of hell. Yet it is essential to find the words to convey the suffering of a population pushed to its limits. Terre des hommes (Tdh) takes you into this apocalyptic landscape, where your invaluable support helps children reclaim a small measure of normality.



↑ **Mohammed and his uncle prepare lunch, placing small pieces of wood under the pots to revive the flames.**

Walking through the devastated streets of Gaza's cities, everything is dust and ruins. This is the scene of desolation that Mohammed, 10, sees every day from the window of the home he shares with his family. *"I've been displaced six times,"* says the boy, wearing a pink T-shirt. Despite his hollow cheeks, tired eyes, and very pale complexion, his smile never leaves him — a shield against pain.

Mohammed walks kilometers to gather firewood. Since there's no more gas, Gazans are forced to cook over a wood fire. In the dim light, uncle and nephew look haggard. Their tired faces are those of hunger.

"There's no chicken, no eggs... and especially no ice cream, no Oreos, no marshmallows... nothing!" laments Mohammed. Today, even the simplest necessities have become a luxury: the price of sugar, for example, increased a hundredfold at the height of the conflict. *"Canned food gives me stomach aches,"* he insists, *"in Gaza, everything is contaminated!"* He has been afraid to drink water ever since he had a viral hepatitis from it. Um, mother of five, confirms: *"It's impossible to eat like normal people, and the water is not safe to drink, not for washing, and not even for cleaning clothes. Most children and elderly people have infections and red rashes on their skin due to the lack of water and hygiene products."* Overwhelmed, she is as tired as she is resigned: *"It feels like pain has become normal. I'm 50, but I feel 150."* On top of the hunger and thirst is the foul smell caused by the accumulation of rubbish. As waste collection is no longer possible, people now dispose of it as best they can, with the resulting health consequences.

Did you know?



Half a million

people suffered from **hunger** in **Gaza** in 2025

On the battered street outside, a boy carries a flour bag almost as big as him. Around him, ruins pile up, frozen like mountains of silence — the remnants of the building across the street. The house where Mohammed lives has miraculously remained standing. As we go inside, the exposed concrete blocks give the impression of being in a cellar. In a corner of a room that can hardly be called a kitchen, his uncle silently arranges the branches brought in by the boy. Each day,

In Gaza, 1 in 5 children suffers from acute malnutrition

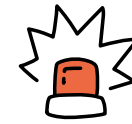
Faced with this emergency, Tdh delivered safe drinking water by truck this summer to Deir al-Balah and Khan Yunis, two areas hosting hundreds of thousands of displaced families. Addressing something as basic as providing water illustrates Gaza's cruel reality — made worse by the fact that humanitarian aid is just a few kilometers away, often blocked behind the border. While trucks wait in an endless line, famine slowly sets in Gaza. According to UNICEF, severe acute malnutrition — the deadliest form — affects one in five children in Gaza City.

It has become a common sight in Gaza: in the camps for displaced families, hundreds of children wait at food distribution points, an empty container in their hands. Haggard, exhausted, and starving, they form endless lines. The children do not speak or play — anxious to bring food back to the tents or temporary shelters where they live with other families. At distribution points, hunger can trigger violent disputes, and smaller children often leave empty-handed. Some dig in the sand in search of stray grains of rice. They are all driven by a single goal: to survive. **Just to survive.**



©Tdh/Majdi Fathi

Did you know?
64,000
Gazan children, including
**1000 infants, have been
killed or mutilated since
October 2023**



Omar, 14, was injured while trying to collect food at one of the distribution points run by the so-called “Gaza Humanitarian Foundation” — sites grimly nicknamed “death zones” by the population. His family did not know he had gone. “*I had no choice,*” he told his Tdh case manager. Omar’s father is disabled and cannot walk. His family now lives in a makeshift shelter exposed to the elements. Tdh, in coordination with other organizations, stepped in to improve the family’s situation. Tarps were provided for their home, and financial aid allowed Omar to avoid risking his life in these “death zones.” His mother welcomed our support with tears in her eyes, relieved to see something positive happen in their lives. With this financial aid, the family was able to buy basic necessities: flour, bread, baby formula, and diapers.

What can be rebuilt when only ruins remain?

Much, much more must be done. Ceasefire or not, peace treaty or not, the situation remains catastrophic. Everything must be rebuilt: homes, schools, hospitals. Even the ground is littered with unexploded ordnance, making every step dangerous. In tents, temporary shelters, or makeshift homes, babies lie on thin mats on the floor, watched over by older siblings. Children roam the streets amid debris, carrying bags, scanning for any glimmer of hope. But there is not much — especially as winter, along with its damp and windy weather, arrives. After two years of bombings, destruction has left people destitute. “*I’m scared because we don’t have enough blankets, and we need curtains to cover the broken windows,*” says Wafa, 11, who has been

“A little girl came to one of our sessions carrying a cooking pot. When the session ended, she hurried to queue for a meal at the community kitchen. A child should attend our activities well-fed, clean, and free — not burdened by basic survival needs.”



Hadeel Abu Qamar, a Tdh facilitator specializing in mental health and psychosocial support, recalls this haunting image.

What determines a genocide?

For over fifty years, Tdh has witnessed life under blockade and the deprivation imposed on Gaza's population. We have seen poverty, forced displacement, and the collapse of health and education systems. But over the past two years, violence has escalated beyond a humanitarian tragedy: it has crossed the threshold of genocide. Thousands of children have been killed, starved, or deliberately denied access to water, medical care, and safety.

In September 2025, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territories confirmed what we already knew: these acts were committed with the intention of destroying, in whole or in part, the civilian population of Gaza — the basis for labeling them genocide. Immediate action is required: a lasting ceasefire, the unconditional reopening of humanitarian corridors, the restoration of essential services, and the recognition of the victims' right to justice.



displaced *"at least 10 times."* Her green eyes pierce the horizon. She sleeps on a thin mattress on the floor, sand lingering across her skin like the fear of death. *"I just want to go to school! The last time I went was October 5, 2023!"*

How can one live a normal childhood when unfairly targeted by air strikes? Jamal, 11, lost a leg in a bombing. Uncomfortably seated on an old dusty mattress, he recounts his tragic story. He lived in northern Gaza when his house was bombed, killing his father. His family then took shelter in a school, where he set up a small stall to earn money and help support them. Another bombing struck Jamal's family, and this time his leg was



"I just want to go to school! The last time I went was October 2023!"

Wafa, 11 years old

seriously injured. Amputation was inevitable. After a period of using crutches, a prosthesis now helps him walk and regain some semblance of normality.

But what is normality when injustice takes your leg at 11? What is normality when you grow up without enough food, school or safety? Half of Gaza's population is under 18. The area has been under blockade since 2007, which means that more than half of Gazans have never known true freedom. Though war intensified from October 2023, Gaza, a naturally beautiful strip of land now torn by brutality, has been deprived of normal life for much longer.

Jamal recalls his story, uncomfortably seated on a old dusty mattress amid the rubbles near his home





Workshops to prevent explosions

In a tent in a camp for displaced persons, thirty children sit on the floor, watching a peer walk forward and then backward following the exact same path. Under the watchful eye of our facilitator, he explains to his classmates what to do if they inadvertently find themselves in an area where there may be unexploded bombs: *“If you find yourself in the middle of debris, you have to immediately turn back, and follow the same path, walking in exactly the same steps.”* This exercise is part of a workshop organised by Tdh to raise awareness on the risks associated with explosive ordnance. Every month, 700 children take part in them.

‘Something as simple as a game can brighten up a day.’

That is why it is very important to recreate the conditions of a child’s routine. Under large, stretched tarps, our temporary learning spaces are taking shape: small tents measuring around 15 square metres, each dedicated to a specific age group. Inside, colourful drawings, white boards and school bags recreate a familiar world that contrasts sharply with the surrounding desolation. When the classroom doors open, the children line up with an almost solemn discipline, adopting the behaviors of students they have never forgotten, despite two years away from school.



The smell of markers and notebooks, the squeak of a chair, the whispers of classmates—yes, school is back! It is in one of those spaces that we find Noor, 8, who lives in a camp set up on the sand near Khan Younis. Wearing a pink sleeveless jacket and a white sweater, with coffee-coloured eyes and a determined look, the little girl lights up when the teacher calls her to the blackboard to draw a letter of the alphabet. She carefully sketches a ب - ‘b’ - before returning to her seat and beginning a painting session with her classmates. She chooses blue, her favourite colour.



“I love drawing!
But I also like studying,
writing, playing games
and singing!”

Noor, 8 years old

Every month, nearly 1,400 children take part in these activities and have access to informal education: learning, improving their reading and maths skills, and fostering their personal and social development in a safe and supportive environment. Mahmoud Abu

Saada, a facilitator at Tdh, points out that in Gaza, children have lost all reference points: *“Their homes, their schools, their playgrounds, eating a proper meal: they miss all of that. Everyday experiences are important: playing in a park, celebrating a holiday, having a meal with the family...”* These informal activities run by Tdh offer children a window of serenity and carefreeness. *“Something as small as a toy or as simple as a game can brighten their day,”* insists Mahmoud.

Since Tdh opened its learning centers, Nour has regained a sense of normality, as if she were reliving her former daily life. *“Now I can go to school three days a week! Before, I spent my days queuing in front of the distribution centres for food and water. But now I spend my days here! Every time I come, I feel happy. I mean... I’m not sad all the time anymore, I’m a little happier.”* Noor is the youngest of six siblings. Every evening, her parents and five brothers, delighted to see her return to school, take turns helping her with homework, sharing in the joy of learning together.

Did you know?
At least

1,400

children benefit from
our informal education activities
every month



Mahmoud can feel this happiness the moment the children gather. *“They love these sessions and always ask when the next one will be. They want to bring their friends. The slightest positive action makes*

them feel good." Especially when they experience the pleasant feeling of reconnecting with other children. "I'm happy to play with the others. I have two very good friends here. I love them so much!" smiles Noor.

Perhaps with peace and a spirit of solidarity, the children of Gaza will one day find their way back to school and laughter for good!

When the bombs finally stop raining down and humanitarian access is fully restored, it will be necessary to rebuild with these traumatised children, as Mahmoud reminds us. "They are innocent and deserve better. If we don't support them today, how can we expect them to become strong adults in the future?"

Children never stop thinking about their future. With one voice, they call for an end to oppression or a return "home" - a "home" that, for most of them, no longer exists. But these children also have simple dreams, which they confide to Mohammed. "I love science and I want to be an astronaut," says Abdel, while Noor wants to "be a doctor or a nurse."



These dreams show how much Gazan children still cherish their childhood, despite everything. As long as they can imagine a future, we can help them build it, step by step. Today, your support can offer them safe spaces to play and learn and the simple right to look forward to tomorrow.

Together, we can turn these fragile glimmers of hope into a concrete future.

*All the names have been changed.

Marc Nouaux

With your donation, we can, for example



A word with

Lidwien Wijchers, *specialist in child protection in emergencies*

Lidwien Wijchers has been working in Gaza with Terre des hommes (Tdh) since March 2025. She describes a daily life stripped of humanity, where — despite everything — children regain, through Tdh's activities, a breath of childhood.



“The moment they’re with us, hope returns. They laugh, they’re excited, they’re happy. That’s why we keep fighting to make these activities happen, against all odds: to let them be children again.”

How would you describe the situation in Gaza?

Inhumane. *(She pauses.)* And depressing, because it’s hard to keep hope alive. I don’t think there’s a word strong enough — in any language — to describe what we see here. It’s often said that in Gaza, there is nowhere safe, and that’s true. Sometimes we work in a place, and the next day it’s gone, destroyed by an airstrike. We track the GPS coordinates of every staff member and alert each other as soon as an attack is reported. But there are always more bombings than warnings. To say it plainly: going to work isn’t any more dangerous than simply waking up in the morning. In Gaza, every day you wonder if it might be your last.

How are your Palestinian colleagues coping?

Every day is a challenge — finding food, water, firewood to cook since there’s no gas anymore. Simply surviving. People in Gaza have been living through horror for two years. Not to mention what their lives were like before — already far from normal, with constant restrictions on freedom. Yet they carry on. They come to work with energy, give everything for the children, and still manage to make jokes. It’s incredible!

How is it possible to run activities for children amid such chaos?

There’s always someone ready to help — to organize, find materials, or identify families in need. Gaza has been struggling to survive for so long that it has developed an extraordinary sense of solidarity. Our activities often take place outdoors, since there are no shelters. In summer it’s too hot, in winter it’s cold and rainy — but people adapt, again and again. Despite the hardship, we are uplifted by the resilience of the community, who, sadly, are used to this context. Our staff and local partners are incredibly creative and flexible. They use whatever they can find to organize a session, even if it’s not enough to meet all needs. The people of Gaza never give up — especially when it comes to their children!

Here, we welcome children in small groups — about twenty at a time — for an hour of activities, before handing over to others. The goal is simple: make sure as many children as possible can participate!



Do children still have hope?

They've forgotten what it means to be children. For them, it's normal to queue for food or walk long distances to find water. Yet beyond wanting the war to end, their wishes are simple: they dream of a football field where they can play again, because they all want to bend it like Messi! They all want to go back to school — without exception. They want to see their friends again or have colored pencils to draw.

We teach them new games that require very little material or organization so they can play even when we're not there. We also talk to the parents about the importance of letting children play, despite everything. And we see the impact: the moment they're with us, hope returns. They laugh, they're excited, they're happy.

For an hour, they become children again — and forget what's around them. That's why we keep fighting to make these activities happen, against all odds: to let them be children again.

Interview by Marc Nouaux

Has there been a story that particularly moved you?

Yes. One day, the W.H.O. contacted us about a child who had been admitted to the hospital in critical condition after a bombing. His sister, who was also injured, was being treated there as well. Their parents had been killed. Their only close relative was another sister living in Gaza City, but she couldn't come — transport costs were too high, and travel is long, sometimes on foot or by donkey cart. We were about to reunite the siblings when that sister was killed in another airstrike. Our teams had to break the news to the children and urgently find them a home with one of Tdh's partner organizations.

Can you imagine such a chain of trauma? The road to recovery — physical or psychological — will be long. But we are standing by them, helping them grow up in a loving, stable environment, with the care they need.

↙ **In a camp for displaced families near Khan Younis, our temporary learning space offers children a breath of fresh air. The bursts of laughter and bright colours contrast sharply with the desolate surroundings.**



Felecia's Journal

"From Gaza to the West Bank"

In the West Bank, a Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, violence is escalating: assassinations, demolitions, expulsions, forced displacement... A colonisation described by the United Nations as a "flagrant violation of international law." Over the past two years, this surge in violence in the West Bank – coupled with the horrors witnessed in Gaza – has plunged Palestinian families into fear: what if tomorrow, they were next?

Felecia Adeb Saleh is a Programme Coordinator at the Terre des hommes (Tdh) office in Ramallah, in the West Bank, where she was born. Here, she shares a few pages from her journal, recounting her daily life and that of so many other Palestinians in 2025.

3 January 2025

How could I describe life under occupation? I often think about it, but I can't find the words. I was born here. Yet every morning, on my way to work, I have to prove my identity every ten minutes. I think back to that trip to Europe years ago – I was overwhelmed to be able to cross borders without being asked for my ID. Here, there are over a thousand checkpoints across a territory barely larger than 5,000km². Travelling from one city to another becomes an obstacle course, punctuated by the humiliation of military controls.

31 March 2025

Sometimes, I dream of a journey without fear.



Over the past two years, fear has found on a new face. Gaza is burning, and we know that violence could reach us at any moment. We often repeat this phrase, almost in a whisper:

"After Gaza, we will be next."

Since January, thousands have been forced to flee their homes, especially in Jenin and Tulkarem. More than 3,300 arbitrary arrests, and sixteen children killed in just a few months. Every day, a new name is added to the list of victims. And every parent fears their child could be next...

25 June 2025

Being a parent in the West Bank means having to explain the inexplicable.

When images from Gaza flood the screens, or when bombs fall not far from us, children ask why. Why them? Why now? And we have no answer. This month, when Iran retaliated against Israeli strikes, bombs also fell here, on our rooftops. How do you explain to a child that their home was destroyed for no reason? How can you promise that everything will be fine, when you don't even know yourself?

No child should grow up in the rubble.



Children are always happy to come to school for their lessons.

1 November 2025

Despite everything, there is still a glimmer of hope.

Our new Tdh programme in the West Bank has been running for a month now. We hope to reach 45,000 children in the most at-risk areas - Jenin, Tulkarem, Bethlehem, Hebron and Nablus. To this end, we have created spaces that serve as refuges for children and the adults who care for them. There, each child can rediscover a little bit of their childhood: they have access to psychosocial support, learning spaces to compensate for the lack of schooling, structured games, and more. Sometimes, when I look at them, I think these spaces are not just shelters. They are promises — of life, of future, of humanity.



5 September 2025

Learning is our treasure, our last refuge. But this year, even the start of the school year has a bitter taste: teachers are not always paid, classes are reduced to four days instead of five, and two days now take place online — a format that’s hardly compatible with the daily lives of large families who cannot afford one screen per child or a stable internet connection. We have lost our homes, our land, and our olive trees.

Education is all we have left — at least, they cannot take it away from us!



12 October 2025

October is the olive harvest season. It’s our celebration, our heritage: families gather, laugh, and sing between the rows of trees. But this year, many cannot participate — their land has been confiscated. Without a harvest, they lose their income... and a part of their identity. Youth unemployment has just passed 70%.

As parents, we cannot help but worry about our children’s future.

Your support is a breath of fresh air! In a world where everything is falling apart, it gives Palestinian children something priceless: a glimmer of hope.



In Tdh centres, we play, laugh and sing!



Here, it’s as if everything is possible again.







Gift a star!

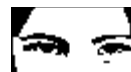
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