

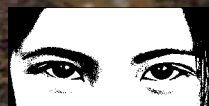
*Terre des hommes Magazine*

# Courage



*Gaza*  
**children fight  
for existence**

N° 85 | June 2024



**Terre des hommes**  
Helping children worldwide.



“Peace and hope. I believe in it, because if we have no hope, what do we have left?”

**Khitam Abuhamad**, Head of the Tdh office in Gaza


## In Gaza, everyone has lost loved ones

After living through six months of war and horror in Gaza, I was able to flee to Cairo. I imagined buying everything I hadn't been able to eat since October. When I tasted my first banana, I didn't taste anything, because I was thinking about my family, still stuck in Gaza. Maybe it's unconscious guilt, but ever since I arrived in Egypt, I've been eating the same products I had in Rafah. The same biscuits or the same brand of water. I don't want to have any more than they have over there.

During those six months, night and darkness were particularly frightening: as soon as I closed my eyes, I was convinced that it would be my last night. Waking up every morning was like a miracle. I left my flat in the north of Gaza on 11 October to take refuge with one of my sisters. It was there that a bombing almost took my life. I'll never forget it: I found myself under the rubble, surrounded by thick black clouds of smoke and dust. The air was no longer breathable and I was beginning to suffocate. I thought I was going to die. I managed to get out of the rubble and save my brother-in-law. But I lost people close to me, including my 11-year-old niece. In Gaza, everyone has lost family, friends or acquaintances.

In November, I arrived in the south, in Rafah, where with the support of other colleagues, I did everything I could to restart the activities of Terre des hommes. There was an urgent need to help the most vulnerable. Children are paying the heaviest price in this war: out of 35,000 Palestinians killed, around 14,000 are children! It's a figure we can't even begin to imagine. For those who survive, the conditions are appalling: they lack water and food, and if they are injured or ill, it is almost impossible to receive treatment. Do you realise that children are dying of hunger? No human being should have to go through what the children of Gaza are going through. I was born and grew up in Gaza, and I can tell you that what we are seeing today is on an unprecedented scale.

On the following pages, you will discover how Palestinian families in Gaza are struggling to survive. In the West Bank too, children are feeling the consequences of the war. Their daily lives have been dramatically disrupted. Despite very restricted access, Terre des hommes is accompanying the children and their parents in this absolute humanitarian emergency, because the priority is to save as many lives as possible. Even if the tunnel is very dark and very long, there will be light at the end. A light that we call peace and justice. I believe in it, because if we have no hope, what do we have left?



Khitam Abuhamad

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# **Palestinian children: their fight to exist**

**Horror is hitting Gaza on an unprecedented scale: destruction and death punctuate a daily life that leaves no room for security. In this chaos, children are in mortal danger from bombardments, famine and disease. In the West Bank, the repercussions are just as terrible for the Palestinians, victims of an upsurge in violence. We take a look inside a war that kills mostly women and children.**



Hundreds of tents of all colours are set up on the sand at the foot of a row of buildings. The threads that hold the tents together are used to dry the washing around which the children play hide-and-peek. Others use them as volleyball nets to play a match. In the background, two minarets dominate the city, which bears the scars of the bombings. As you walk between the tents, you can see the intense, disillusioned looks on the faces of their occupants. Despite the anxiety, smiles can sometimes be spotted. Music, too, because it's good for the soul. Between two bombings, you can hear a teenager rhythmically banging a saucepan.

Since October 2023 and the start of the war in Gaza, the governorate of Rafah has been home to the daily tumult of displaced people. Terre des hommes (Tdh) is working in the UNRWA refugee camps. The makeshift shelter of Maha\*, aged 39, is one of the few places that offers her a little privacy. But the sounds of warplanes flying overhead are a constant reminder that no one is safe. And when you don't hear a plane, it's the rain that echoes off the tent. Because in chaos, there is never silence.



*"We no longer know the difference between the sound of thunder and bombing."*

Maha, widow with her children

The mother, widowed after her husband was killed in a bombing raid, reveals her ultimate dream, that of "sleeping soundly", because even her right to sleep has been compromised. She talks of her anxieties, with a baby in her arms, the last of her children, for whom she uses old clothes as nappies because she can't find the necessary materials. *"We no longer know the difference between the sound of thunder and the bombings. With each explosion, the sky over Rafah lights up. Our lives are filled with terror."*



Did you know?

**45'000**

people receive  
emergency aid from Tdh in Gaza

When daylight falls, between the tents, the flames of the stoves light up the faces marked by months of exile and appalling living conditions. Large bowls of food are shared, provided there is enough to cook. Outside his tent, Abu Sanad\*, aged 73, laments the fact that he can no longer enjoy his Friday plates of grilled meat: *"Now I eat khobaizah (grilled wild plant). Isn't it a shame to have to put up with this at my age?"* That's one of the tragedies of this war: there isn't enough to eat. To find food, children or parents risk being killed as they cross highly dangerous areas where they may be targeted by gunfire or bombardment. As a result, according to Human Rights Watch, 90% of children under the age of two and pregnant or breast-feeding women in Gaza face "severe food poverty", meaning they eat less than two meals a day. 10-year-old Huda\* with a black hoodie draped over her shoulders, expresses her hunger and thirst in an outraged voice as she zigzags between the waterlogged potholes: *"I'm desperate because I only eat dry food and I have to queue to drink."*

### Limited humanitarian aid

Despite this dramatic situation, humanitarian aid is struggling to find a way to meet the needs of the more than one million people displaced to Rafah. Thousands of lorries, loaded with food and equipment, wait behind barriers. Yet only a few kilometres separate the goods from those who need them: on the other side of the border, in Egypt, Tdh teams are working hard. The first convoy they succeeded in bringing in November to Rafah, the only authorised crossing point for humanitarian aid, contained more than 10,000 kits with canned food, first aid kits as well as nappies, formula and baby equipment. With the second convoy, which arrived in February, Tdh supplied almost 2,000 family dignity kits, including shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste and feminine protection. At the same time, 1,650 families received toys and equipment to carry out fun and educational activities with their children. But because of administrative obstacles, *"we are a long way from a sufficient humanitarian response,"* regrets Simone Manfredi, head of the Tdh delegation in Jerusalem. The

Israeli authorities block access for goods and humanitarian aid. *"In Gaza, we can only rely on our local team, which is itself badly affected,"* explains Simone.

Our teams are relieved when the lorries manage to get through. Since March, Tdh has managed to send one convoy a month to help 45,000 people, or 7,500 families. The aim is to restore the dignity of the most vulnerable, while maintaining recreational activities with the children, who also need to play and express their feelings.

### Children without prospects

In the alleys of the refugee camps, old and young rub shoulders. From time to time, the older ones place a reassuring hand on the shoulders of the younger ones. When there is a rare silence, people talk. About the war, of course. *"We only talk about things and people in the past tense, as if we had no present or future,"* asserts Khitam Abuhamad, head of the Tdh office in Gaza.

It is indeed difficult to talk about the future, the plans of the youngest and the happy lives that could be lived at the end of this road that seems to have no way out.

### Blockages delay good intentions

*"Usually, the lorries reach Rafah in one to two weeks,"* explains Pantelis Kouvaris, Tdh's emergency logistics coordinator for the humanitarian response in Gaza. *"From now on, everything depends on the ongoing hostilities and the goodwill of the Israeli authorities. The process is long: we can wait over a month. Sometimes, for no reason, the lorry is blocked."* The time lost in transporting goods is enormous and prevents more lives from being saved. The situation on the ground is becoming untenable, with children and the elderly hungry and thirsty.



The children try, because they like to have objectives and goals that they think are realistic: to return home, to have news of family members or friends they have lost along the way, to have enough to eat, to find a bed where they can sleep well...



Did you know?

**200+**

people working in the humanitarian sector have been killed since the start of the war

Above all, they need to stop hearing more bombs, aeroplanes or heart-rending screams. They also need to rediscover their dreams, because there's nothing sadder than losing your aspirations.



With the limited food available, the displaced families cook in front of their tents.

Samar\*, aged 12, asks herself: "Will we ever be able to go back to school?" Mariam\*, aged 10, has a heart drawn on her pink jumper, in the middle of which the words «Love forever» stand in stark contrast to the brutality of the war. "I wanted to become an engineer, but since the start of this war, I've realised that I'll never be anything." To be nothing: a horrible disavowal that a child should never feel. But the bombings and forced displacement were too violent, the shock too strong. As a result, children who no longer have any prospects become stressed.



"Will we ever be able to go back to school?"

Samar, 12 years old

"They have trouble sleeping, they feel angry and express aggression," says Khitam. "These are typical symptoms of a traumatic life. For 17 years, they've been living under a permanent blockade, they've already been through several wars and they've never lived a whole day without a power cut."

In this context, Tdh sets up activities to protect children and their families. For example, psychological first aid and participation in games enable children to open up by helping them to unburden themselves by talking about their traumas. Parents are also given key messages and awareness-raising activities to help them resolve conflicts within the family, a normal reaction in a traumatic situation. "We give parents the keys to managing their children's stress by adopting a positive frame of mind," Khitam sums up.

Thanks to this help, the youngest children are able to hold on to their lives as children. The elderly also need to believe in something positive, like Abu Sanad, who feverishly states his only wish. "To return home, even if our houses are destroyed. We would be happy even if we had to sit on stones."



"We give parents the keys to managing their children's stress by adopting a positive frame of mind."

Khitam Abuhamad, Head of the Tdh office in Gaza



“We will never give up.”

Caroline, 10 years old

But where Abu Sanad comes from, the situation is even more dramatic and uncertain. *“There are 300,000 people in the north of Gaza about whom we know nothing,”* explains Simone. *“It’s not possible to see them or send them aid because access is blocked to humanitarian organisations.”*

### West Bank: living under threat

Did you know?

**450+**



**Palestinians were killed in the West Bank since October 2023, a quarter of them are children**

And while Gaza burns, displaced Palestinians survive and to return to their destroyed homes, the West Bank is also a scene of violence. The consequences of the war are making themselves felt: since October 2023, more than 450 Palestinians, a quarter of them children, have been killed and more than 200 children are believed to be held in Israeli prisons. Evictions,

expropriations, arbitrary arrests, assaults in the street, destruction of farms and agricultural land, obstruction of access to essential services... Palestinians in the West Bank are seeing their most fundamental rights violated at the same time as their prospects are declining. *“They have no certainty and live under constant threat,”* says Simone. *“One day, a family’s house is demolished without knowing why, except that illegal settlements are going to be built in its place.”*

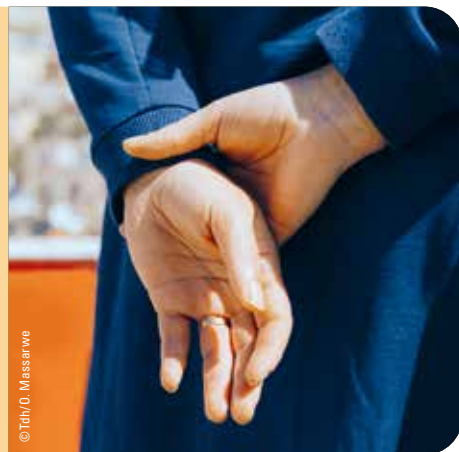
For example, Hadya\*, aged 55, was ordered to demolish her house without any justification. With the help of a lawyer, she managed to have only the second floor demolished, she recounts from her courtyard, in a neighbourhood saturated with overcrowded buildings. *“The irony is that the second floor was demolished on my wedding anniversary,”* she continues. *“But there are thirteen of us living here, so it’s become too small with one floor less.”* Despite this reduction in her living space, Hadya has no intention of leaving, abandoning her walls, her plants

and her beehives, which she loves looking after so much. *“My whole life is here.”* To overcome all these hardships, Hadya can now count on the support of Tdh and its local partner organisation. *“When I feel bad, I go to the organisation’s centre to get support.”* The activities she takes part in, such as walking or cooking with other women, allow her to evacuate her traumas. Talking, telling stories, opening up. When sharing the pain, they understand each other. *“It wasn’t easy at first, but hearing other stories has stimulated me and I go home feeling energised and happy.”*

A few streets away from Hadya’s place, 10-year-old Caroline\* hides her face but not her message. *“Children are afraid to go out alone, even to buy sweets,”* she reveals. With her back to the photographer, her long brunette braid falling over her red jacket, she opens her arms wide in front of the buildings in her neighbourhood threatened with demolition. In addition to the words she never shies away from, *“We will never give up”*, she has graffitied the walls of her neighbourhood

### **"We are becoming more self-confident"**

Qamar\*, aged 34, is the mother of five children. Married at 15 to her cousin, she takes part in Tdh support activities to overcome the daily difficulties she faces in East Jerusalem: *"The place where we meet is a refuge. Since the start of the war, we've hardly been able to move around, and I was already suffering from the restrictions on movement imposed by the occupation. So we need safe places to meet up."* The support group sessions are helping to keep her spirits up at a time when she hasn't been able to see her parents for several months. *"We talk to each other to solve our problems. We become more self-confident. After a meeting, I feel more active and full of energy."*



with her classmates and teachers. Disappointed to see that the Israeli army partially destroyed her drawing, she justifies the initiative. *"The drawing expresses our position against violence and our support for women. The key is a symbol of our heritage and our homes, which we don't want to see destroyed."* Never give up. Never give up. The children of Gaza and the West Bank are driven by this determination. Tdh helps them by accompanying them individually to evacuate their traumas. By offering them spaces where they feel safe, by giving them the opportunity to express

themselves, Palestinian children are trying to exist and move forward. They must never forget that they can be the actors in their own lives. Like Caroline, buoyed up by the unshakeable insouciance of childhood and by the support they

receive, the youngest will not give up. *"We use the word resilience a lot, but here it's bigger than that,"* says Simone. *"Meeting Palestinians on a daily basis gives us hope and the will to fight with them."*

Marc Nouaux

*"We use the word resilience a lot, but here it's bigger than that."*



**Simone Manfredi,**  
Head of the Tdh delegation  
in Jerusalem

\* First names have been changed for protection reasons.

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# Word to

## A social worker from our partner organisation in East Jerusalem

Since the start of the war in Gaza, the Palestinians in the West Bank have experienced an upsurge in violence and injustice. Aida\*, a social worker employed by the partner organisation of Terre des hommes, talks about how we help mothers and their children in this very difficult and dangerous context. She talks about her daily life, her struggles and her determination to help her community with whom she shares the suffering.



“We are all in this together, we share the same memories, feelings and belonging with a strong empathy; all these collective feelings are helping us to resist the threats.”

### Can you tell us about everyday life in East Jerusalem?

Palestinians are subjected to pressure and live in danger and fear, while being deprived of certain basic services. Their dignity is not respected at all. Houses are destroyed and Palestinian families evicted so that settlers can move in place. This situation has been going on for over twenty years, but the problems and injustices have increased with the start of the war in Gaza. Every day there are more and more serious cases, particularly demolitions. Near my home, all the houses and buildings are under threat: there are fears that the whole neighbourhood could be destroyed. This injustice affects more than 100 families who have no alternative accommodation. When Palestinians challenge arbitrary decisions, the courts come up with unfair solutions: for example, people are sometimes only allowed to occupy and build on 20% of the surface area of their land. This is unacceptable.

### Personally, how do you feel about it?

I'm a woman from the neighbourhood where I work, like the people I welcome to the centre. So I'm faced with similar problems. I have to be strong, not mix up my feelings and listen carefully. We're all in this together, we share the same memories, feelings and belonging with a strong empathy; all these collective feelings are helping us to resist the threats.

### What do the parents and children you work with need?

People want to talk, to share their problems with others and learn new ways of dealing with daily changes and struggles, especially among women. They need us to help them express themselves and release their negative thoughts and emotions. To achieve this, we are implementing arts and music activities, through workshops, teaching new life skills with vocational training, for example. We organise our sessions at the centre or at one of the parents' homes over breakfast or a snack. We walk or cook together.



### What successes have you achieved through these activities?

I work with a lot of mothers and, for me, a mother is like a big rope with lots of other ropes attached to it: when that big rope makes a move, the others follow. So as soon as she acquires new problem-solving skills and adopts positive communication with her children, this automatically has a positive effect on all the members of her family.

Furthermore, children witnessed all the events that are happening in the country. So, it's very important to talk with the parents and the community about how to support our children, let them express their feelings and mitigate the risks in terms of negative emotions, anxiety or violent behaviour.

### What advice do you give parents on how to manage their children's emotions during this crisis?

It is important for parents to have a calm and positive conversation with their children. Parents must embody a safe space, a source of security and trust. This way, children will not seek external influences that could put them in danger. Our children must always feel that they can approach us at any time.

### What makes you proud and inspires you to continue your mission?

The closeness I have with the families and the trust they place in me are invaluable. Ever since I started this job, I've had the feeling that I can deliver and fulfil the humanitarian message I believe in. I've found myself in this job! And the people here give me a lot back. They develop resilience, patience and strength. Through this job, I've learnt that when you share problems and find support from those around you, it's easier to overcome obstacles.

\*Name changed for security reasons.

↪ **Aïda's colleague, a psychologist, talks to mothers in the West Bank to empower them.**





**Every child in the world has the right to a childhood. It's that simple.**

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