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BMJ Paediatrics Open

Mental health impact on children of forcible home invasions in the occupied Palestinian territory

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Keywords:	Child Abuse, Child Psychiatry

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Mental health impact on children of forcible home invasions in the occupied Palestinian territory

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Keywords: public health, community child health, child rights

Word count: 1170

References: 7

Review Only

Mental health impact on children of forcible home invasions in the occupied Palestinian territory

A new report by 3 leading Israeli human rights organizations — Physicians for Human Rights Israel, Yesh Din and Breaking the Silence — documents the grievous mental health repercussions, including on children, of the Israeli policy of forcible invasions by the military into the homes of West Bank Palestinian families. The report, titled “Life Exposed”[1] is based on 158 interviews of Palestinians who experienced home invasions, as well as over 40 soldiers who carried them out. Following three years of joint work, the report documents how these invasions, which number more than 250 a month [2] and are primarily carried out between midnight and 05:00, traumatize and cause harm to Palestinians adults and children, and effectively serve to intimidate and maintain control over the Palestinian population.

Why do such home invasions take place? It is possible to identify four main types of military intrusions into Palestinian homes in the West Bank: Searches for money, weapons or other items; arrest of a member of the family; “mapping” and documenting the physical features of the house and the identity of its occupants; and seizure for operational needs, such as setting up an observation post. As such, as the report states, ‘almost any situation could meet the conditions for approving a military invasion into a Palestinian home in the West Bank.’ [3] The number of soldiers intruding into the house ranges from a handful to roughly 30. The average duration of an invasion, in the cases documented, is around 80 minutes. More than 60% of those interviewed confirmed that soldiers invaded their home more than once. The army alleges that these invasions are based on security needs. However, as the report concludes, home invasions are frequently a tool for deterrence, intimidation, and collective punishment to increase military control over the population. [4]

Home invasions by the Israeli military are characterized by unjustifiable and excessive use of force, arbitrariness, unpredictability and frequency, leaving families and individuals vulnerable to the decisions of soldiers, who hold immense power. Home invasions inflict psychological damage on both individuals and communities, as they involve a sudden, forced intrusion into the victims’ private space along with a real threat of physical harm.

Meanwhile, Israeli law stipulates that searches in homes of Israeli families, including those living in a settlement just hundreds of meters away from homes of Palestinians, should be conducted according to a judicial warrant issued on the basis of evidence and concrete information that point to substantiated suspicion and in keeping with a limited list of offenses. Palestinians in the West Bank do not enjoy such protections; military law in the West Bank does not require a judicial warrant confirming the necessity of the intrusion in order to invade the private domain and any military officer may order them. As such, it leaves Palestinians constantly vulnerable to arbitrary invasions into their homes, without the limitations on governmental authorities which citizens have a right to expect.

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3 As these invasions happen at night in Palestinian homes, they are largely invisible, as opposed
4 to other elements of the occupation, such as settlement building and military checkpoints.
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7 The mental health impact of the invasions, particularly on children, is significant. PHRI carried
8 out 31 in-depth interviews of men and women based on a questionnaire formulated by mental
9 health experts. The 31 interviewees had 41 children among them. The interviews were
10 conducted by a social worker and a field coordinator several months after the home invasion,
11 using a semi-structured interview format based on a questionnaire and delivered in Arabic. To
12 avoid potential harm, no children were interviewed directly, but parents were asked about their
13 children's mental health.
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16 Interviews revealed that the main experience reported by those who experienced home
17 invasions was that of loss of control and a deep sense of helplessness that are central feelings
18 in traumatic events. Parents testified to feelings of helplessness — also in terms of protecting
19 their children — as well as anxiety and other symptoms that are stress related, such as
20 insomnia. Children, meanwhile, regressed to increased dependency on parents, including
21 difficulty falling asleep and wanting to sleep close to their parents, while parents saw an
22 increase in aggressive behavior. Dependency on parents and the need to remain close to them
23 could impact children's ability to participate in school and in social activities regularly. Some
24 families indicated deterioration in functioning, demonstrated in difficulties remaining committed
25 to school and even dropping out. Some parents reported their children exhibited physical
26 symptoms such as abdominal pain along with reluctance to remain alone at night - a possible
27 physical translation of the negative emotions the children feel. These invasions significantly
28 impair the development and functioning of both children and adults, while the repetitious and
29 arbitrary nature of such invasions exacerbates the feelings that accompany the event and the
30 post-trauma symptoms.
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35 Forcible home invasions are not the only exposure these victims have to direct and indirect
36 violence. It is well established that there is a high prevalence of stress related disorders and
37 especially post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Palestinians. While life time prevalence
38 for PTSD in children ranges from 6.8 to 12.2% worldwide, among Palestinian children living in
39 the West Bank it is estimated to be 34.1 to 50.4%. [5 [6)
40
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42 The way in which these invasions are conducted (without specific and precise grounds defined
43 by law, level of proof or a court reviewing the grounds for entry, etc), is a violation of the UN
44 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Israel has ratified. The CRC also places
45 special emphasis on the dignity of the child, stipulating that "No child shall be subjected to
46 arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence." [7] All
47 children are entitled to the rights enshrined in the CRC, without requirement of citizenship or
48 residency.
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51 Although international law does not expressly forbid invading the homes of protected persons in
52 an occupied territory, it does require the occupying power to strike a balance between the need
53 to maintain public order and safety and the severity of the harm the action causes and requires
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3 that actions be proportional and non-arbitrary. The way in which forcible home invasions take
4 place therefore results in a violation of international law.
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7 Moreover, the differential application of the law on two populations living in occupied territory on
8 the basis of national distinction – Palestinians living under occupation and subject to military law
9 and Israeli settlers whose presence in occupied territory is illegal according to international law
10 and are governed by Israeli modern laws– constitutes a clear violation of the prohibition on
11 discrimination on the basis of nationality as set forth in international human rights law.
12

13
14 We urge that national pediatric organisations in Israel speak up on behalf of the children who
15 are being traumatised by these invasions of their personal space, and that international
16 paediatric organisations act as representatives of the children who have no voice and appeal to
17 the Israeli government to end these critically harmful practices.
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25 Tony Waterston, International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health
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32 public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.
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35

36 Competing interests statement: There were no competing interests
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39

40 Contributorship statement:
41

42 DM made a substantial contribution to the conception and design of the paper
43

44 GM made a substantial contribution to the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of the data for
45 the work
46

47 JM made a substantial contribution to acquisition, analysis and interpretation of the data for the
48 work
49

50 TW revised the work critically for important intellectual content, and gave final approval of the
51 version to be published
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Ethics statement:

The work was carried out by an NGO in Israel, Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI). The research methodology was inspected by an independent committee but not an Ethics committee, specifically a steering committee of experts in the field of mental health which provided guidance to the interviewers. The steering committee provided guidance in relation to ethical issues in the questionnaires.

Patients or public involvement:

It was not appropriate or possible to involve patients or the public in the design or conduct or reporting or dissemination plans of our research

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1. A Life exposed: Military Invasions of Palestinian homes in the West Bank. A joint report by Yesh Din, Physicians for Human Rights Israel and Breaking the Silence. November 2020. https://www.phr.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Exposed_Life_ENG.pdf
2. Based on figures provided to Yesh Din on July 8, 2019 by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
3. A Life Exposed, Executive Summary, p. 3 https://www.phr.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Exposed_Life_Short_ENG.pdf
4. A Life Exposed, p. 63
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7. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 16.

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Why do such home invasions take place? It is possible to identify four main types of military intrusions into Palestinian homes in the West Bank: Searches for money, weapons or other items; arrest of a member of the family; “mapping” and documenting the physical features of the house and the identity of its occupants; and seizure for operational needs, such as setting up an observation post. As such, as the report states, ‘almost any situation could meet the conditions for approving a military invasion into a Palestinian home in the West Bank.’ [1] The number of soldiers intruding into the house ranges from a handful to roughly 30. The average duration of an invasion, in the cases documented, is around 80 minutes. More than 60% of those interviewed confirmed that soldiers invaded their home more than once. The army alleges that these invasions are based on security needs. However, as the report concludes, home invasions are frequently a tool for deterrence, intimidation, and collective punishment to increase military control over the population. [1]

Home invasions by the Israeli military are characterized by unjustifiable and excessive use of force, arbitrariness, unpredictability and frequency, leaving families and individuals vulnerable to the decisions of soldiers, who hold immense power. Home invasions inflict psychological damage on both individuals and communities, as they involve a sudden, forced intrusion into the victims’ private space along with a real threat of physical harm.

Meanwhile, Israeli law stipulates that searches in homes of Israeli families, including those living in a settlement just hundreds of meters away from homes of Palestinians, should be conducted according to a judicial warrant issued on the basis of evidence and concrete information that point to substantiated suspicion and in keeping with a limited list of offenses. Palestinians in the West Bank do not enjoy such protections; military law in the West Bank does not require a judicial warrant confirming the necessity of the intrusion in order to invade the private domain and any military officer may order them. As such, it leaves Palestinians constantly vulnerable to arbitrary invasions into their homes, without the limitations on governmental authorities which citizens have a right to expect.

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6 to other elements of the occupation, such as settlement building and military checkpoints.
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9 The mental health impact of the invasions, particularly on children, is significant. PHRI carried
10 out 31 in-depth interviews of men and women as part of the above study, based on a
11 questionnaire formulated by a mental health committee of Palestinian and Israeli health
12 professionals, who provided guidance to the project. The 31 interviewees had 41 children
13 among them, aged from several months to 17 years, with an average age of eight years. The
14 interviews were conducted by a social worker and a field coordinator several months after the
15 home invasion, using a semi-structured interview format based on a questionnaire and delivered
16 in Arabic. To avoid potential emotional harm, no children were interviewed directly, but parents
17 were asked about their children's mental health. There were some limitations to the research
18 due to the nature of it being a pilot survey: children were not interviewed directly, the sample
19 was relatively small, there was no corroboration of the exact timing of the home invasion and
20 therefore the time lapse between the invasion and the interview, and as children living under
21 occupation are exposed to a wide variety of traumatic events, it is not always clear to which
22 event the symptoms may be attributed. These were considered by the mental health committee
23 that formulated and oversaw the interviews.
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28 Interviews revealed that the main experience reported by those who experienced home
29 invasions was that of loss of control and a deep sense of helplessness that are central feelings
30 in traumatic events. Parents testified to feelings of helplessness — also in terms of protecting
31 their children — as well as anxiety and other symptoms that are stress related, such as
32 insomnia. Children, meanwhile, regressed to increased dependency on parents, including
33 difficulty falling asleep and wanting to sleep close to their parents, while parents saw an
34 increase in aggressive behavior. Dependency on parents and the need to remain close to them
35 could impact children's ability to participate in school and in social activities regularly. Some
36 families indicated deterioration in functioning, demonstrated in difficulties remaining committed
37 to school and six even dropped out. Over 15% of the parents reported their children exhibited
38 physical symptoms such as abdominal pain along with reluctance to remain alone at night - a
39 possible physical translation of the negative emotions the children feel. These invasions
40 significantly impair the development and functioning of both children and adults, while the
41 repetitious and arbitrary nature of such invasions exacerbates the feelings that accompany the
42 event and the post-trauma symptoms.
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47 Forcible home invasions are not the only exposure these victims have to direct and indirect
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49 especially post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Palestinians. While life time prevalence
50 for PTSD in children ranges from 6.8 to 12.2% worldwide, among Palestinian children living in
51 the West Bank it is estimated to be 34.1 to 50.4%. [3] [4]
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4 special emphasis on the dignity of the child, stipulating that “No child shall be subjected to
5 arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence.”[5] All
6 children are entitled to the rights enshrined in the CRC, without requirement of citizenship or
7 residency. The CRC forms part of public international law and is therefore binding upon the
8 signatory states. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its review of Israel, has noted
9 the applicability of the Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory [6]
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12 Although international law does not expressly forbid invading the homes of protected persons in
13 an occupied territory, it does require the occupying power to strike a balance between the need
14 to maintain public order and safety and the severity of the harm the action causes and requires
15 that actions be proportional and non-arbitrary. The way in which forcible home invasions take
16 place therefore results in a violation of international law.
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19 Moreover, the differential application of the law on two populations living in occupied territory on
20 the basis of national distinction – Palestinians living under occupation and subject to military law
21 and Israeli settlers whose presence in occupied territory is illegal according to international law
22 and are governed by Israeli modern laws– constitutes a clear violation of the prohibition on
23 discrimination on the basis of nationality as set forth in international human rights law.
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27 are being traumatised by these invasions of their personal space, and that international
28 paediatric organisations act as representatives of the children who have no voice and appeal to
29 the Israeli government to end these critically harmful practices.
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38 Tony Waterston, International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health
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45 public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.
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49 Competing interests statement: There were no competing interests
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53 Contributorship statement:
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55 DM made a substantial contribution to the conception and design of the paper
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3 GM made a substantial contribution to the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of the data for
4 the work
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6 JM made a substantial contribution to acquisition, analysis and interpretation of the data for the
7 work
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9 TW revised the work critically for important intellectual content, and gave final approval of the
10 version to be published
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14 15 16 Ethics statement:

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18 The work was carried out by an NGO in Israel, Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI). The
19 research methodology was inspected by an independent committee but not an Ethics
20 committee, specifically a steering committee of experts in the field of mental health which
21 provided guidance to the interviewers. The steering committee provided guidance in relation to
22 ethical issues in the questionnaires.
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25 Patients or public involvement:

26 It was not appropriate or possible to involve patients or the public in the design or conduct or
27 reporting or dissemination plans of our research
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30 31 References

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35 1. A Life exposed: Military Invasions of Palestinian homes in the West Bank. A joint report
36 by Yesh Din, Physicians for Human Rights Israel and Breaking the Silence. November
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42 2. Based on figures provided to Yesh Din on July 8, 2019 by the United Nations Office for
43 the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
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54 Advances in continuous traumatic Stress theory: Traumatogenic dynamics and
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3 consequences of intergroup conflict: the Palestinian adolescents case. PSYCH.
4 2013;04(04): 396-40
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9 5. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 16.
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11 6. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *UN Committee on the Rights of the*
12 *Child: Concluding Observations: Israel*, 9 October 2002, CRC/C/15/Add.195, ¶¶ 5,
13 available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3df587210.html> [accessed 26 May 2021]
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Mental health impact on children of forcible home invasions in the occupied Palestinian territory

A new report by 3 leading Israeli human rights organizations — Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI), Yesh Din and Breaking the Silence — documents the grievous mental health repercussions, including on children, of the Israeli policy of forcible invasions by the military into the homes of West Bank Palestinian families. The report, titled “Life Exposed”[1] is based on 158 interviews of Palestinians who experienced home invasions, as well as over 40 soldiers who carried them out. Following three years of joint work, the report documents how these invasions, which number more than 250 a month [2] and are primarily carried out between midnight and 05:00, traumatize and cause harm to Palestinians adults and children, and effectively serve to intimidate and maintain control over the Palestinian population. At a time when there are increasing concerns globally about violence perpetrated against children, the political goals of this tactic, its frequency, the adverse mental health impact on children, as well as lack of available studies until now means that it bears close examination and criticism.

Why do such home invasions take place? It is possible to identify four main types of military intrusions into Palestinian homes in the West Bank: Searches for money, weapons or other items; arrest of a member of the family; “mapping” and documenting the physical features of the house and the identity of its occupants; and seizure for operational needs, such as setting up an observation post. As such, as the report states, ‘almost any situation could meet the conditions for approving a military invasion into a Palestinian home in the West Bank.’ [1] The number of soldiers intruding into the house ranges from a handful to roughly 30. The average duration of an invasion, in the cases documented, is around 80 minutes. More than 60% of those interviewed confirmed that soldiers invaded their home more than once. The army alleges that these invasions are based on security needs. However, as the report concludes, home invasions are frequently a tool for deterrence, intimidation, and collective punishment to increase military control over the population. [1]

Home invasions by the Israeli military are characterized by unjustifiable and excessive use of force, arbitrariness, unpredictability and frequency, leaving families and individuals vulnerable to the decisions of soldiers, who hold immense power. Home invasions inflict psychological damage on both individuals and communities, as they involve a sudden, forced intrusion into the victims’ private space along with a real threat of physical harm. The report demonstrates the significant mental health impact on both parents and children of the home invasions.

Meanwhile, Israeli law stipulates that searches in homes of Israeli families, including those living in a settlement just hundreds of meters away from homes of Palestinians, should be conducted according to a judicial warrant issued on the basis of evidence and concrete information that point to substantiated suspicion and in keeping with a limited list of offenses. Palestinians in the West Bank do not enjoy such protections; military law in the West Bank does not require a judicial warrant confirming the necessity of the intrusion in order to invade the private domain and any military officer may order them. As such, it leaves Palestinians constantly vulnerable to

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3 arbitrary invasions into their homes, without the limitations on governmental authorities which
4 citizens have a right to expect.
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9 As these invasions happen at night in Palestinian homes, they are largely invisible, as opposed
10 to other elements of the occupation, such as settlement building and military checkpoints.
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12 The mental health impact of the invasions, particularly on children, is significant. These
13 invasions significantly impair the development and functioning of both children and adults, while
14 the repetitious and arbitrary nature of such invasions exacerbates the feelings that accompany
15 the event and the post-trauma symptoms.
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18 Forcible home invasions are not the only exposure these victims have to direct and indirect
19 violence. It is well established that there is a high prevalence of stress related disorders and
20 especially post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Palestinians. While life time prevalence
21 for PTSD in children ranges from 6.8 to 12.2% worldwide, among Palestinian children living in
22 the West Bank it is estimated to be 34.1 to 50.4%. [3] [4]
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25 The way in which these invasions are conducted (without specific and precise grounds defined
26 by law, level of proof or a court reviewing the grounds for entry, etc), is a violation of the UN
27 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Israel has ratified. The CRC also places
28 special emphasis on the dignity of the child, stipulating that “No child shall be subjected to
29 arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence.”[5] All
30 children are entitled to the rights enshrined in the CRC, without requirement of citizenship or
31 residency. The CRC forms part of public international law and is therefore binding upon the
32 signatory states. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its review of Israel, has noted
33 the applicability of the Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory [6]
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37 Although international law does not expressly forbid invading the homes of protected persons in
38 an occupied territory, it does require the occupying power to strike a balance between the need
39 to maintain public order and safety and the severity of the harm the action causes and requires
40 that actions be proportional and non-arbitrary. The way in which forcible home invasions take
41 place therefore results in a violation of international law.
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44 Moreover, the differential application of the law on two populations living in occupied territory on
45 the basis of national distinction – Palestinians living under occupation and subject to military law
46 and Israeli settlers whose presence in occupied territory is illegal according to international law
47 and are governed by Israeli modern laws– constitutes a clear violation of the prohibition on
48 discrimination on the basis of nationality as set forth in international human rights law.
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51 Following intensive advocacy by the aforementioned organizations, the Israeli army announced
52 in June 2021 that it would no longer raid homes for the purposes of mappings. While this is a
53 significant achievement, the army will still continue the practice of home invasions itself, under
54 the different justifications that it has used thus far. It remains to be seen whether this change will
55 lessen the number of home invasions that actually take place.
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We urge that national pediatric organisations in Israel speak up on behalf of the children who are being traumatised by these invasions of their personal space, and that international paediatric organisations act as representatives of the children who have no voice and appeal to the Israeli government to end these critically harmful practices.

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