

## **Killings of children: A tussle between cruelty and compassion**

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The ongoing scene of the Palestine-Israel conflict seems like Brecht's epic theatre, where the tussle between human cruelty and human compassion is being staged at different locations across the world. In this epic scene one can easily find and understand that big towers of cruelty are standing with their heads raised on all sides. But sprinkles of compassion, even if small, are also spread everywhere. The indiscriminate killings of children is perhaps the worst form of human cruelty. By Hamas in southern Israel on October 7 and subsequently by the army of Israel in Palestine's Gaza Strip the killings of thousands of innocent children have become a topic of discussion/debate among politicians, diplomats, journalists and concerned citizens world over. But even after more than a month of conflict, there is no letup in the killings of children. The incident of killing of about 6,000 children in a month in Gaza, which is 41 km long, 6 to 12 km wide and has a total area of around 360 square km, is perhaps the first in the history of wars. Let us think a little about this heartbreaking episode of our times.

Since Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, about 6,000 children have died in the Gaza Strip under a heavy and continuous bombardment done by Israel Defense Forces (IDF). A large number of children are said to be buried under the debris. Before this, in the Hamas attack, about 30 children were killed, about two dozen children became orphans and about 35 children were taken hostage. Yesterday in Lebanon too, three children were reported killed in an Israeli attack. From Israel to America and Europe, there has been a lot of propaganda politics on the children killed in the Hamas attack. For example, the news of beheading of children by Hamas terrorists in the October 7 attack was carried in the Israeli media. US President Joe Biden had also repeated it. However, that news turned out to be false. Israel's Foreign Minister showed videos and photographs of children brutally killed in the Hamas attack at a NATO meeting. This is also an aspect of cruelty that politics is being played on the murders of children in order to justify the killings of children, and to win the public opinion. On the other hand, people driven by compassion are shaken. How weak the side of compassion is in this tussle between cruelty and compassion is evident from the fact that no consensus has been reached on a ceasefire yet. However, on November 9, the White House reported that there would be a military pause of 4 hours a day in Gaza, so that people from the northern area could move to the southern area and humanitarian aid could be

delivered. However, in the meantime the Israeli army's action against Hamas will continue.

Although every life is precious and absolutely savable, killing children is a direct crime against nature. It is the children who later become adults; and good and bad too. Destroying a life before it can come to fruition cannot be justified by any logic. Neither the killings of children committed by Hamas, nor the killings continued by Israel in retaliation. It has been more than a month since the war. The Israeli government and military establishment are still justifying the killings of children. Its soldiers, who have entered Gaza after the ground attack, are saying that whoever is here (in Gaza) is our enemy. (The nearly 100 UN staff killed so far also fall into the category of Israel's enemies.) Israel's argument for adult citizens is the same for children - that children are Hamas's "human shields."

The surprising thing is that while doing all this, Israel says that "its army is the most ethically moral army in the world." It also claims that in the ongoing war Israel is "following the highest standards of international laws." Where does it get the courage for such self-righteous claims would be a matter of contemplation? However, there is no scope for that in this write up. Countries supporting Israel and America are in their support with minor ifs and buts. None of them bang their fists on the discussion table and ask, how did Israel achieve the highest standards of military ethics and international laws by killing 6,000 innocent children outside the laid down norms by the United Nations? Even the relatively neutral and peace-loving countries of the world do not have a decisive stand on the question of the killings of children. Even Gandhi's country could not say in the United Nations that it is necessary to save children before eliminating Hamas! In fact, neither Hamas nor Israel will be eliminated, only innocent civilians including children will be eliminated every time – be it terror actions by Hamas or military actions by IDF.

Among the major powers, anti-American countries such as Russia, China, Iran and Turkey are not opposed to cruelty. Not even cruelty towards children. It is futile to appeal to them in favor of compassion by citing the murders of children. The records of their own countries regarding civil rights and liberties are not hidden. Their attitude towards the prescribed international rules and regulations is also similar to that of Israel and other powerful countries.

It would be germane to keep in mind that the spread of cruelty is not limited to Israel and its supporting countries. Organizations and countries who support Hamas cite the killings of children in Gaza as a reason for a ceasefire. But they do not do this out of true concern. Just as Israel does not feel pain about Palestinian children, similarly Hamas supporters do not regret the killings of Israeli children. Hezbollah is often mentioned among the staunch supporters of Hamas. Hezbollah Chief Hassan Nasrallah did not say anything about the Hamas attack and Israel's war for almost a month. In his highly publicized one-hour-twenty-minute speech on November 3, he described Hamas's October 7 attack as "heroic, great and grand." He described the killings of "so-called innocent civilians" (including children) killed in Hamas attacks as the work of the Israeli army acting in "fury, insanity and confusion." On the killings of children in Gaza, he said that the children are martyring; and they will go straight to heaven. His overall message in this regard was that the children in Gaza are being martyred on the altar of Islam; so there is no reason to get unnecessarily moved. Hezbollah's deputy chief Naim Qassem said in a statement that the killings of children in Gaza would unite all Palestinians. That means all Palestinians will unite behind Hamas; not for the freedom of Palestine, but for the glory of Islam!

Nasrallah, in his speech, warned all Arab Muslims that Israel is a "brutal and murderous entity" for them. The campaign to erase its existence forever started on 7 October. All these statements of his are similar to the statements of Zionist Israeli leaders, military officers and civilians. For both sides, religion and race are greater than human dignity and freedom. With such a mind-set how could there be a space for compassion for the killed children! However, people angry at Nasrallah for not declaring immediate war against Israel threw shoes at his picture on TV. Nasrallah again had to give a statement and give a strong threat of war to Israel and America.

Mustafa Barghouti, Secretary General of the Palestinian National Initiative and member of the Palestine Legislative Assembly, who lives in the West Bank, is a medical doctor by profession. He believes in non-violence. He has probably given the maximum number of interviews to the press on the issue. He would not be ready to talk about Hamas's October 7 attack as an isolated incident. He would rather insist that the October 7 attack should be seen as a reaction to Israel's repeated misdeeds over the past 75 years, that is, keeping the entire context in mind. He insists that Palestinians are facing "genocide, mass punishment and ethnic cleansing" perpetrated by Israel; as long as Palestinians are not considered oppressed and Israel is considered oppressor, the true perspective of the issue

cannot emerge. His interview given to Sky News channel mainly focused on the killings of children. Dr. Barghouti considers America not only complicit in the ongoing child killings in Gaza, but a direct participant. Barghouti, who considers Israeli Zionism to be the root of the entire problem, says nothing about Hamas's involvement in the murders of children in Israel or in Gaza!

At least looking at the behavior of the ruling institutions, it seems that cruelty has taken a strong hold on human civilization. Children not only become victims of cruelty when they are killed, but even when they survive, their lives become toys in the hands of cruelty. This is perhaps the deepest crisis of modern civilization. But compassion never leaves humans completely. In many countries of the world, spontaneous marches/movements of concerned citizens are taking place protesting the killings of children. Countless citizens from all over the world are united with them. These are the citizens who do not view the killings of children – whether in Ukraine, Israel, Gaza or anywhere else in the world – through the lens of religion or race. Rather they look at it from the perspective of human compassion. This is the true source of compassion - compassion for humanity - which must always remain.