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Where Fear Hides, Hope Shines: Gaza's Children in the Shadow of War

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Combining reportage with personal reflection, this article sheds light on the impact of the occupation upon children in Gaza – informing readers and testifying to the realities of war. Using video, image and reported speech, the author preserves the experiences of a young boy, Oday, and his little brother. This contribution upholds the dignity of children in Gaza, showing how their stories can be told ethically and with compassion.

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Where Fear Hides, Hope Shines: Gaza's Children in the Shadow of War

Dana Hamdan

Walking not knowing where,
Living not knowing how,
Hoping, not knowing why.

Maybe you want to meet the future, believing that better days are coming, that somehow this chaos will end. Or maybe you wish you could ask the future if all this pain is worth enduring, if one day it will truly end.

Desperately walking through the streets, surrounded by every kind of misery, I see an old man carrying the remains of his life behind him. I see a child pushing, with his tiny hands, a life toward an unknown fate. I ask myself: why? How? So many questions burn in my mind, but only hope answers them. Hope is what makes us keep moving toward a life we don't fully know, a life that so often takes more than it gives. Still, we live.

When you look into the eyes of a child in Gaza, you see two different and contrasting worlds colliding: one filled with suffering, the other still defiantly dreaming. Hope is what keeps those little eyes dreaming of a better life. A life without the sound of shelling and explosions, without the echo of fear, and the smell of death chasing them into every corner. A life where schools remain schools, not evacuation centres, where streets are for playing, not for waiting in lines for food.

Since 7 October 2023, everything has changed. Security, education, health... every essential piece of daily life was stolen from Gaza's people. But what breaks my heart the most are the Children. They deserve the best of life, yet they are forced to live a nightmare they never chose.

Education is the first dream that war tried to destroy. The entire educational system has come under severe attack, threatening the future of a whole generation. More than **625,000 students** have been deprived of their right to continue their education and pursue their studies.¹ Schools, universities, libraries, and even Kindergartens have been destroyed, and the rest converted into shelters and displacement centres. Classrooms turned into tents, libraries into rubble, playgrounds into graveyards.

¹ UNICEF SoP, 'UNICEF in the State of Palestine Escalation Humanitarian Situation Report No.23 – Reporting Period: 4 to 17 April 2024', April 2024, www.unicef.org/sop/reports/unicef-state-palestine-escalation-humanitarian-situation-report-no23.

Health is another tragedy. During this brutal war, Children suffer a lot with health issues, including the spread of diseases, inadequate healthcare services, and a severe shortage of essential medical supplies.

Gaza is living one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history, since the blockade began on 2 March 2025. Over **470,000 people**² are living under conditions of catastrophic hunger, which children face with their frail, thin bodies, leading to over **16,700 children**³ suffering from malnutrition.

One of these children is Oday, a 10-year-old child living in Gaza. Oday has been displaced from Gaza City since October 2023; he left his house and has been living in a tent with his parents and siblings since then.⁴ I met Oday when I was visiting the beach (for the first time in two years) and heard two boys arguing and blaming each other loudly. I tried to separate them. Oday and his 7-year-old brother were arguing because the young one had dropped the money they'd made from selling water that day, and Oday was afraid of his boss since he was new to this work. I started talking with them to calm them. We continued talking and talking.

Oday's life has changed; instead of waking up and waiting for his mother to bring him and his siblings' breakfast, he goes early to line up at the "Tikkia" – community kitchens that prepare and distribute food to thousands of people in Gaza – hoping he can get some food for his family. Here is how the process works: with sponsorship from local and international charities like World Central Kitchen, community kitchens prepare several pots of food and then transport it to at least one displacement camp or distribution point, where men, women and children queue with small pots in the hope of receiving a portion. The kinds of food distributed depend on what is available on the market. Mostly, rice, lentils, canned vegetables, pasta and other simple local dishes are provided – meals that can be distributed to people easily and fairly.

Due to food scarcity and high prices, most families cannot get a daily supply of food. In particular, people who have been displaced from their homes and live in tents within displacement camps are left with no option but to wait for help from organisations who can provide food parcels, hot meals, or money cards, for all their vital supplies. This even applies to people who have a modest income, let alone those who currently do not. Alongside other charities, World Central Kitchen provides hot meals to all the displacement camps; however, it is impossible to do so because of the high number of

2 World Food Programme, 'WFP Statement on Gaza', 27 July 2025, www.wfp.org/news/wfp-statement-gaza.

3 Merve Aydoğan, 'UN warns of "alarming rate" in rise of malnourished children in Gaza', 20 June 2025, Anadolu Agency, www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/un-warns-of-alarming-rate-in-rise-of-malnourished-children-in-gaza/3606301#.

4 On 13 October 2023, the Israeli army issued evacuation orders across Gaza City for residents to move southwards.

displaced families, the majority of whom depend on Tikkia as their primary and only source of food.

Most of the time, for Oday, his brother and so many others, the food runs out before they reach the front of the line. Sometimes, it is so crowded that many people, especially children, cannot reach the front of the line, or the distribution points are so far from where they live that they only arrive after the food has been distributed. Even if Oday and his brother could get some food, they would sacrifice their portions for their little sister.



Dana working to distribute aid and talking to the children she supports. Photo courtesy of the author.

After food, he and his brother go to search for water, as the issue of sourcing drinkable water is rising day by day alongside food scarcity. Most days, they return with nothing.

I asked Oday if he goes to school or not, surprisingly, he said: "Yes! I go to school, here near us in Al-Zawayda area, where we are displaced!" This answer gives a little bit of hope amid this darkness. He didn't give up on his right to go to school and learn like other children. Although children shouldn't have to look for food and water, especially when they are so young.

But school looks different, he says: "it's full of displaced people all around, we sit on the ground in the school yard, imagining it as a classroom. The school's walls look strange; it is all black and dusty. It is not my school, but I still love it; it reminds me of good days somehow."

Oday's memories of good days are interrupted when he goes to work after school. He sells water in plastic bags, usually near the beach where we met. To get this water, Oday either travels to one of the few stations remaining in Gaza – replenished by water trucks – or he goes to the trucks directly as they distribute water in the displacement camps, filling containers that he later sells from. He barely holds the big bucket, which weighs more than he does, filled with water bags. He keeps calling, "cold water, water, water..." till the sun sets, and after this long day, he goes home only to repeat it again and again.



Oday and his younger brother.

Video link: <https://vimeo.com/1133455312?fl=pl&fe=sh>.

Photo and video courtesy of the author.

Oday and many children of Gaza live almost the same life of loss, disorientation, and marginalisation. A life they never wished for – one which they are trying to survive.

Gaza's children deserve life more than death; they deserve dreams made real, not fading mirages.

With all of this, there is still a glimpse of hope shining through, even if it is dusted for a little while, it's still shining with an unprecedented determination for a change. Hope in a future they have not yet lived but are willing to fight for with no fear, because those who have lived this present will never fear anything else.

Biography

Dana Hamdan is a senior in English Language and Literature at Al-Aqsa University. She is interested in humanitarian work and public service, and presently works in Gaza with [Pomozi.ba](https://pomozi.ba) – a Bosnian charity. Recently, Dana became more involved in writing, and seeks to highlight what her people are going through during these hard times, because she believes in the power of words to make change. Dana's most recent work can be found on Substack: [@danasdiaries](https://danasdiaries.substack.com).