

Eye-witness recounts horror of Shireen Abu Akleh's murder

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Shatha Hanaysha, a 29-year-old Palestinian journalist, was with Shireen Abu Akleh when she was shot dead by Israeli regime forces. (Photo by Ruptly/Press TV)

Ramallah, May 26 (RHC)-- When Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was killed by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin earlier this month, her younger colleague Shatha Hanaysha barely escaped death herself.

The 29-year-old correspondent for the local news portal Ultra Palestine and contributor to the U.S.-based website Middle East Eye was next to Abu Akleh when they were targeted by Israeli troops.

In an interview with Press TV, Hanaysha recounted the harrowing incident, when her mentor and role model was fatally shot in the face while they were covering the Israeli military raid in Jenin. She describes it as “the hardest experience” of her life, not because she had a narrow escape but because she and other young Palestinian journalists lost their friend, philosopher and guide.

“We lost a person we loved, someone who was like a teacher to us, someone we looked up to,” she said, struggling to hold back tears. “It is hard to come to terms with her death.”

In a viral video, immediately after Abu Akleh was shot, Hanaysha can be seen in a crouching position next to the veteran Al Jazeera Arabic journalist, frightened, screaming, then covering her mouth and crying.

“I am speaking to you more than a week after the incident,” she told Press TV. “But it still does not sink in. I still cannot fathom why it happened, why Shireen was killed, why they tried to kill us.”

Hanaysha, who has been reporting from the occupied West Bank for more than six years, said she still has not mustered the courage to watch videos in which Abu Akleh is seen lying in pools of blood.

At that very moment, she recalls, the only thought that crossed her mind was about Abu Akleh, to make sure someone comes to help and saves her life. “I was only thinking about Shireen. I was trying to touch her, wondering whether she was still alive. I was thinking how I can help her, how I can protect her, how I can prevent bullets from hitting her again,” she said.

“In my mind, I wanted an ambulance to come there to help Shireen and take her to the hospital. This is all I was thinking at that moment.” Hanaysha said she was later told that bullets had pierced the tree above her, pointing to the indiscriminate nature of the Israeli attack on the journalists at the scene.

The journalists, including Abu Akleh and Hanaysha, who were reporting on the raid were all wearing helmets and vests clearly marked “PRESS.” They had even waited for the regime forces to notice their presence.

“When we went to that street that day to cover the Israeli military raid, we saw Israeli military vehicles approaching and they also noticed our presence,” she remarked, dismissing the propaganda peddled by Israeli and Western media that it could have been Palestinian fire.

“I know who shot Shireen and who tried to kill the rest of us. They were Israeli troops and not anyone else,” the 29-year-old reporter told Press TV. “It was not at all a case of mistaken identity.”

Moments before Abu Akleh was shot dead, the trigger-happy Israeli forces raiding the area had injured her colleague Ali al-Samoudi, who was immediately rushed to a hospital.

The indiscriminate fire continued as Abu Akleh and Hanaysha moved together close to a wall to avoid being hit. But bullets were aimed at them, one of which hit Abu Akleh in the face, the unprotected part.

“They deliberately tried to kill us because the shooting was still underway when my colleague Ali [al-Samoudi] was hit,” Hanaysha said. “The shelling continued until Shireen was shot and collapsed.”

On the Israeli regime’s refusal to open an investigation into Abu Akleh’s killing, Hanaysha said the regime wants to escape accountability for its horrendous crimes in the occupied territories. “Israeli regime forces regularly kill Palestinians in villages and cities and they always manage to get away with it,” she said. “Nobody bothers to hold them accountable.”

The 29-year-old Palestinian journalist said Abu Akleh's tragic death has affected them all, but it won't deter them from continuing to report on the Israeli regime's crimes. "They killed Shireen and tried to kill us because they wanted to terrify us, to make us stop doing our work, unmasking their crimes," Hanaysha said. "But it won't stop us. We shall continue to do our work more passionately and honestly."

Abu Akleh has been hailed as the voice of Palestinians in their longstanding struggle for the liberation of their occupied lands and homes from the apartheid Israeli regime.

Her ghastly killing has been widely condemned across the globe, despite the Western media's attempts to put a spin on it, to absolve the child-murdering regime in Tel Aviv of its crimes.

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