

Palestinian children in Gaza write names on their arms to be easily indentified if killed in Israeli airstrikes



Gaza City, October 28 (RHC)-- As the Israeli bombs thundered and shook the world around them, Sara al-Khalidi and her four children clung to each other on the floor of their living room in Gaza City's Tal al-Hawa neighbourhood, trembling with fear.

The explosions did not stop all night, creating what Sara said was a fire belt in the area. “At that moment, I thought that if the house was hit by a severe bombing, my children would die, and no one would be able to identify them,” the 40-year-old said. “I was afraid of this idea.”

The family survived the night and the next day made their way south to Khan Younis to stay at a relative’s house where they thought they would be safer. However, Sara was shocked to see members of her extended family writing the names of their children on their bodies.

The idea made her cry and she worried that if she did the same then she would be bringing bad luck to her children. But after seeing one of the doctors at al-Shifa Hospital writing the children’s names on their bodies, Sara changed her mind.

“The world should know about these children who were murdered by Israel because they are not numbers, but names, stories and dreams killed by the Israeli occupation in Gaza,” she said.

Over the past three weeks, Israel’s relentless bombardment of the besieged Gaza Strip, one of the world’s most densely populated areas, has wrought dizzying levels of carnage. More than 7,300 Palestinians have been killed, including about 3,000 children. A further 1,650 Palestinians remain trapped under the rubble of their homes and buildings, half of them children.

On Friday night, Israel also cut off all communication services in Gaza, sparking concerns of potential war crimes carried out under the cover of an information blackout.

In addition to imposing a total blockade on the coastal enclave, where fuel, clean water and electricity have run out, Israeli warplanes have also targeted critical infrastructure. More than 200,000 housing units have been partially or wholly destroyed.

According to the United Nations, 1.4 million Palestinians – more than half of the total population of Gaza – have been internally displaced, following the heavy bombings along with warnings from the Israeli military to those living in northern Gaza to flee to the south. Yet Palestinians say that nowhere is safe, as the indiscriminate bombings have targeted the entire strip – not just the north.

Writing the names of children on their arms or legs is an attempt to bring the families closure in case their children are killed so that they are able to bury them in marked graves as opposed to mass graves.

Some doctors have pointed out that the burns they have seen on the bodies of Palestinians killed are unlike any they have seen, indicating Israel may be using internationally banned munitions. Other bodies have been torn apart in Israeli air attacks on their homes, making it difficult for surviving relatives to identify them.

The health ministry in Gaza, which released a 212-page report of the names of the Palestinians killed, said that there are 200 bodies which have been mangled beyond recognition, and are, therefore, impossible to identify.

Mohammed Abu Odeh, a resident in Gaza, said he believes that Israel, with its precision weaponry, targets children intentionally.

During the May 2021 offensive, he sent two of his children to his brother and took two of his brother’s children, so that in case one of their houses was targeted by Israel, there would be someone left from the other family. “It was a very painful experience,” the 27-year-old from the Shati (Beach) camp said. “We were afraid of losing all of our children.”

This time around, Abu Odeh has kept his children together but has written their names on their arms and legs. “When my children ask me why I’m doing this, I tell them that it is for their safety and protection,” he said. “Can anyone in the world bear the thought of what our children are going through?”

As a parent, preparing oneself physically and psychologically for the worst to happen is exhausting, he said. Abu Odeh doesn't have all the answers to the questions his children ask him, whether it's about their friends who have been killed or about how a child's body can withstand the force of a missile.

"I don't know what to tell them," he said. "I lie to them so they can be strong. How can I reassure them when I'm afraid of this devastating war which is robbing us of everything dear and precious? How can I tell them that their bodies are very strong and can defy missiles?"

He says that children deserve a life where they won't have to be buried under rubble, with the sound of bombing above them. He also says parents should not have to live through the painful reality of trying to identify the bodies of their children, which have been disfigured in the most gruesome way by Israeli missiles.

"Writing my children's names on their bodies is the solution so that the world will know them," he said.

This painful practice is also widespread in many of the United Nations-run schools, where more than 629,000 Palestinians have taken refuge from the bombing. According to Salwa Khattab, who is now sheltering with her family in one such school, there is no safe place in Gaza, not even in the facilities run by UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees.

"This war is targeting everyone," she said. "We do not feel safe or assured here. Look what Israel did to the school in the al-Maghazi refugee camp ... they bombed and killed a number of displaced people."

Between Wednesday and Thursday, the UN agency said that three of its schools had sustained collateral damage due to nearby Israeli raids. One displaced person was killed and 15 others sustained minor injuries.

Khattab has gathered her grandchildren and younger children in the classroom they have been staying in and has written their names on their hands and feet. "I want the world to know them, to mention their names as martyrs killed by Israel without mercy," she said.

Mayar Abu Daqqa, who is from the town of Abasan al-Kabira, east of Khan Younis, said she and her fellow students have all written their names on their own bodies.

Even children who have survived bombings are often "in a state of shock and fear and are unable to speak," the 13-year-old said. "That is why we write our names so that you will know us."

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/337752-palestinian-children-in-gaza-write-names-on-their-arms-to-be-easily-identified-if-killed-in-israeli-airstrikes>



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