

Paralympics: Palestine's Aldeeb sees himself as the voice of his people

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Fadi Aldeeb of Palestine leads their contingent during the opening ceremony of the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris, France on August 28, 2024 [Umit Bektas/Reuters]

Paris, September 3 (RHC)-- Nine months ago, Fadi Aldeeb missed several calls from his brother in Gaza. The next day, Aldeeb found out he had been killed in an Israeli attack on his home. Aldeeb, the only Palestinian athlete at the Paris Paralympics, left the Gaza Strip a decade ago for a wheelchair basketball career that took him to Turkey and Greece before he finally arrived in France.

"On December 6, I had a French league game, and when I was finished, I found my brother had called me many times. ... I tried to call back, but there was no connection," Aldeeb told the Reuters news agency.

"On December 7, I received [the news from Gaza] that 'OK, your brother was killed in an attack on our building,'" Aldeeb said, adding that he often wonders what his brother's last message was.

In Paris, Aldeeb, who took part in the Paralympics shot put event, is feeling the pressure of being what he says is the voice of his people at the Paralympics. "It's too many feelings, too much responsibility, because I'm not speaking about myself, I'm not playing for myself. I'm here for 11 million, for all who say I'm a Palestinian, for all who talk about humanity and to talk about the freedom of Palestine," he said.

"When we are raising the flag here in Paris, we are [showing we are] still alive, we still need our human rights, we still need our freedom," he said.

Aldeeb, 40, said he became paraplegic after being shot in the back by an Israeli soldier in 2001 during the second Intifada, or uprising, against Israeli occupation.

He raises his voice when talking about life in Gaza, where the Ministry of Health says more than 40,000 people have been killed in Israel's genocidal war of aggression.

Aldeeb, who will resume playing wheelchair basketball in the Paris suburb of Gennevilliers after the Paralympics, sees Israel's military as a "killing machine". "There is no difference [for Israel's military] between athletes, disabled or nondisabled, children or women, big or small homes, hospitals, hotels, universities or school," he said.

Aldeeb said he felt uncomfortable about the presence of Israeli athletes in Paris, which held a ceremony before the games to pay tribute to Israeli Olympic team members killed by Palestinian gunmen at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

But he welcomed the support he has received from other competitors, saying: "I'm not feeling that I'm alone or feeling like I'm alone. These people – really, it's amazing and incredible – they give me a feeling of humanity."

The Olympic Charter states that competitors at the Olympic Games should enjoy freedom of expression but that no "political propaganda" is permitted at any Olympic sites, venues or other areas. Playing by the rules, Aldeeb was speaking outside the Olympic village.

[SOURCE: REUTERS NEWS AGENCY]

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