

Family demands independent probe into killing of U.S. activist in West Bank



Photo: Aysenur Ezgi Eygi in Seattle, Washington [Courtesy of the Eygi family/International Solidarity Movement via AP]

Seattle, September 7 (RHC)-- The family of a Turkish-American activist shot and killed by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank urged the United States to launch an independent inquiry into her killing, saying an Israeli probe was not “adequate”.

Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, 26, was shot by an Israeli soldier while taking part in a demonstration against illegal Israeli settlements near the West Bank village of Beita, near the city of Nablus, on Friday, according to witnesses and local authorities.

An autopsy confirmed that Eygi, who died of her wounds at a Nablus hospital, was killed by a sniper bullet to the head, Nablus Governor Ghassan Daghlas told Al Jazeera on Saturday.

Nablus, the governorate where Beita is located, will hold an official ceremony commemorating Eygi after her body is handed to her family, said Daghlas.

“A U.S. citizen, Aysenur was peacefully standing for justice when she was killed,” said her family in a statement on Saturday, describing her as a “fiercely passionate human rights activist.” “Her presence in our lives was taken needlessly, unlawfully and violently by the Israeli military,” the statement said.

Responding to Eygi’s killing, the Israeli military said its forces had fired towards “a main instigator of violent activity who hurled rocks” at them during a protest, and that it was looking into reports that a foreign national was killed.

Eygi was a member of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). The group on Saturday dismissed claims that its activists threw rocks at Israeli forces as “false” and said the demonstration was totally peaceful.

Several witnesses said an Israeli sniper, stationed on a nearby rooftop, shot Eygi after she moved into an olive grove. “A sniper fired from a building – one or two shots – and they targeted and murdered Aysenur,” said British rights activist Rob Sadler, disputing the notion she posed any threat to Israeli forces.

In doing this work, Aysenur “has made the ultimate sacrifice,” Sadler told Al Jazeera. “But we will continue to work in her name and make sure her sacrifice was not for nothing. We’ll continue to bring pressure to bear on Israel until Palestine is free.”

US National Security Council spokesman Sean Savett said President Joe Biden’s administration was “deeply disturbed by [Eygi’s] tragic death” and had asked Israel to investigate.

However, Eygi’s advocates doubt an Israeli inquiry would clarify all the facts or ensure accountability. “If they leave [an inquiry] to the Israeli military, it will go on for weeks and months and then it will be forgotten, like the many cases before this,” Sultan Barakat, professor of public policy at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, told Al Jazeera.

Eygi’s family said an Israeli investigation was not enough “given the circumstances”, and urged the US to handle it. “We call on President Biden, Vice President [Kamala] Harris, and Secretary of State [Antony] Blinken to order an independent investigation into the unlawful killing of a US citizen and to ensure full accountability for the guilty parties,” said the family.

United Nations spokesman Stephane Dujarric also called for a “full investigation”, saying that “civilians must be protected at all times.”



Nablus Governor Ghassan Daghlas, third from right, stands in front of the bodies of Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, left, and 13-year-old Palestinian Bana Baker at a hospital morgue in Nablus, on September 7 [Jaafar Ashtiyeh/AFP]

Eygi is not the first U.S. citizen to be killed by Israeli forces or settlers in the West Bank. Earlier this year, an off-duty Israeli police officer and a settler opened fire and killed 17-year-old U.S. citizen Tawfiq Ajaq near his ancestral village of al-Mazraa ash-Sharqiya. An investigation into the case is ongoing.

In 2022, an Israeli sniper shot U.S. citizen and Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was reporting at the time in the Jenin refugee camp.

U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen said Eygi is the third American to be killed in the West Bank since October 7 and that the Biden administration “has not been doing enough to pursue justice and accountability on their behalf.”

“It is unfortunate but it is not unprecedented,” U.S. lawyer and Palestinian rights activist Tarek Khalil told Al Jazeera. “It’s another incident, another horrific killing of an innocent person who is protesting.”

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