

U.S. man convicted in hate crime murder of Palestinian American boy



Chicago, March 3 (RHC)-- A jury in the U.S. state of Illinois has convicted a man of murder and hate crime charges for the October 2023 stabbing death of a six-year-old Palestinian American boy.

Joseph Czuba, 73, who was found guilty on Friday, faces life in prison when he is sentenced in May for a murder that prosecutors said was prompted by anti-Muslim hatred, and also left the boy's mother critically injured, as stated in court records.

The murder of the boy, Wadee Alfayoumi, and the attack on his mother, Hanan Shaheen, was one of the earliest and worst hate crime incidents in the U.S. since the start of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza.

Czuba, who was the landlord for Shaheen and her son, stabbed the boy 26 times using a military-style knife with a 7-inch (18-cm) serrated blade, authorities said. Shaheen suffered multiple stab wounds in the attack that occurred in Plainfield Township, about 40 miles (64 km) southwest of Chicago.

Michael Fitzgerald, prosecutor at Will County State's Attorney's Office, presented a 911 call recording in the trial.

"The landlord is killing me and my baby," Shaheen is heard saying on the audio.

The case generated headlines around the world and deeply struck the Chicago area's large and established Palestinian community.

"All of us who are parents, who are Arab or Palestinian ... who are Muslim, we all saw our children die in Wadee Alfayoumi, because this could have been any one of our boys, any one of our girls," Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)-Chicago's Ahmed Rehab said, according to The Associated Press news agency.

"It just so happened that it was Wadee Alfayoumi. When he was targeted, all of our children were targeted. Every Muslim was targeted when he [Czuba] yelled: 'All Muslims must die.'"

Abed Ayoub, executive director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), said the verdict delivers a measure of justice for Wadee's family and "sends a clear message that hate-fuelled violence has no place here."

"We will never accept nor forget that a six-year-old child lost his life because of dangerous anti-Palestinian rhetoric," he said, according to the AFP news agency.

Other U.S. incidents raising alarm over anti-Arab bias include the attempted drowning of a three-year-old Palestinian American girl in Texas, the stabbing of a Palestinian American man in Texas, the beating of a Muslim man in New York, a violent mob attack on pro-Palestinian protesters in California and a Florida shooting of two Israeli visitors whom the suspect mistook to be Palestinians.

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