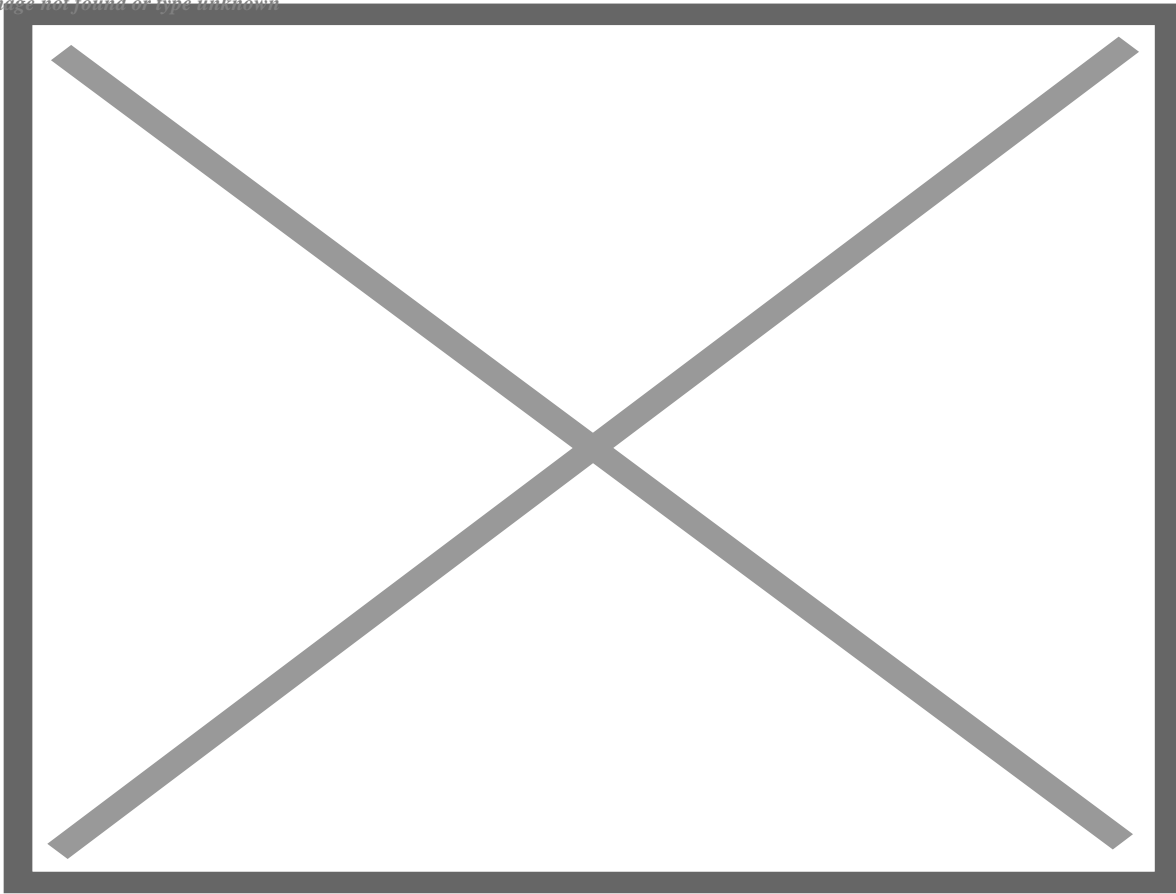# *Decapitated and shredded bodies: Survivors recount Israeli attacks on Gaza schools*

By Tareq S. Hajjaj / from Mondoweiss News Agency

In a scene becoming all too familiar in Gaza, hundreds of Palestinians living in displacement shelters and so-called "safe-zones" were targeted by Israeli bombs over the weekend, with dozens killed and more injured.

Over two days, the Israeli military bombed at least four areas, including two schools, housing displaced families, across the Gaza Strip. Witnesses told Mondoweiss that the bombings left horrific scenes of decapitated and "shredded bodies." The army also bombed a post belonging to Palestinian Civil Defense workers, killing five rescue workers and an Al Jazeera cameraman.

In the northern Gaza Strip, the Israeli army stormed the Khalil Awida School in Beit Hanoun, which is housing approximately 1,500 people who were recently displaced from their homes during Israel's ongoing siege of north Gaza.

According to Muhammad al-Sharif, a journalist in northern Gaza, the army surrounded the school and called out over the loudspeakers, ordering the people inside to move out into the school's courtyard. There, the army separated the women, men, children and elderly, before detaining a number of people and ordering the rest to go to the nearest army checkpoint that would push the residents south, towards Gaza City.

"After the army left, the army threw burning bombs at the school, and those who remained inside and tried to take cover were burned alive by the Israeli army," al-Sharif said. While al-Sharif did not clarify the nature of what he described as "burning bombs," other reports from witnesses indicated that it was artillery shelling.

According to the latest numbers from officials in Gaza, at least 43 people were killed in the Israeli attack on the school.

The Civil Defense said in a statement published on Telegram that its crews spoke to witnesses who had fled the Khalil Awida school towards Gaza City after the Israeli attack. "The displaced families…saw decomposing bodies in the streets, and they saw more than 15 charred and completely burned bodies inside the school…before they were forced to evacuate."

The Civil Defense added that the Israeli army also bombed homes surrounding the school, and that cries could still be heard of people trapped under the rubble.

Khan Younis: Body parts collected in plastic bags
Early Monday morning, just hours after the attack on the school in Beit Hanoun, Israel carried out airstrikes on a school west of Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, killing 20 people. Most of the casualties, according to witnesses, were women and children.

Umm Muhammad Ashour, 64, is a survivor of the bombing of the Ahmad Abdul Aziz school in Khan Younis. She sits in front of the rubble of the classrooms that were targeted in the Israeli strike.   "We were displaced several times until we reached this school," Ashour told Mondoweiss.

"We thought it was a safe school because it is affiliated with UNRWA, but we were surprised by the bombing. They bombed classrooms where five girls and their mother lived. I am their neighbor, and I swear that they went to sleep without dinner last night because they did not have a loaf of bread," she recounted.

Ashour told Mondoweiss that only three girls from the family survived. She added that just a few months ago, the girls' father was killed too. "Now their mother and sisters were martyred…what terrorism did these girls commit for all this to happen to them?", she asked indignantly.

At 8:30 a.m., according to Ashoura, while people were sleeping, Israeli planes fired a missile at the second floor of the school, setting several classrooms on fire, "burning and tearing people apart while they slept."

"Most of them were women and children, dismembered and without heads," she said.

"Everyone started running in panic and trying to get away from the area because we thought the army would bomb it again," Ashoura said. "What can we do while we face all this alone? We sleep and wake up to scenes of death, limbs, and dismembered bodies."

At the nearby Nasser Medical Complex, Rahma Tafesh, 51, wails and cries as she bids farewell to her brother Asaad Tafesh, who was killed alongside 14 members of his family at the Ahmad Abdel Aziz School. The only survivors were Asaad's wife and one of their children. According to Tafesh, they did not find a single complete body of any other family member.

"They were all in one class inside the school, my brother Asaad, his family, his daughter and her family, 14 people, all gone, and no one remained except his wife, who was disfigured by the bombing and still does not know that her entire family was killed," says Tafesh.

When Tafesh arrived at the hospital after hearing the news, she was unable to take one last look at her brother and his family, "They told me he had no head, and I could not look at him one last time. Even his children were piles of gathered flesh."

Thinking about her sister-in-law, who is badly injured and the only survivor of the family, Tafesh says she is praying that her sister-in-law "joins her family [in heaven]" to save her from the physical pain she is in, and the pain of living without them.

The killing of her brother Asaad is the second time in a month that one of Tafesh's siblings were killed by the Israeli army. One month ago, she told Mondoweiss, the Israeli army targeted another brother of hers with his family and killed them all.

"Asaad has joined our brother. A month ago, he and his family were martyred, and now Asaad and his family are joining them. We have no one left after them," Tafesh cries.

Back at the schoolyard in Khan Younis, Ahmed Al-Hajj, 22, stands amidst the bloodied rubble. Around him, groups of people are carrying plastic bags, collecting small pieces of flesh from the victims of the bombing who were blown to pieces.

"We have been displaced in this school for six months, and nothing has happened. This time, something fell on us and lit up the whole school while we slept. It was a big light and we did not know what was happening. Until we discovered that it was a missile that penetrated the roof of the school and exploded in the classrooms, killing everyone in it," Ahmad recounts.

"These are the areas that we are asked to flee to; these are the places that the army expels us from our homes and orders us to escape to," he says, referring to the so-called "safe-zones" that the army orders Palestinians to flee to. "They bring us here to cut us up? This displacement center is classified as a safe center for displaced people. I do not know how they can just kill those inside it," he says.

"The blood on the ground is still not dry. We saw children with their heads open. The same thing would have happened to us if we had been a little closer to the bombing site," Ahmad says.

"No one knows where they can go to take shelter from the Israeli army's attacks."

* Tareq S. Hajjaj

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