

## Operation Cast Lead: Boy (16) killed by falling rubble outside his building



Iyad Saleh (16)

**Iyad Saleh (16) lived with his parents and three brothers in al-'Awda Towers, Beit Hanoun. On 4 January 2009, around 6:30pm, he rushed out of his flat to check on his neighbour, Yahia, and his family, after their apartment was shelled. He then joined people downstairs. When his father returned from the mosque he didn't notice Iyad among the worried crowd. When a second shell hit a tower, he watched in horror as a cascade of rubble fell onto the crowd below. He didn't know his son was among them until he saw him being carried on a stretcher. He got into an ambulance with him and saw the blood-stained clothes covering Iyad's face. His skull was cracked open and his brain spilling out. Iyad was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital.**

Iyad Saleh's (16) father took great care to protect his children during Operation Cast Lead; not allowing them to leave their flat in fear of their safety. Iyad lived with his father, Nabeel (47), mother and three younger brothers on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of Tower 3, al-'Awda Towers, Beit Hanoun. On 3 January 2009, the ground offensive stage of the war had been launched; *"Israeli tanks had invaded the areas of al-'Atara and as-Saltin in Beit Lahiya, west of al-'Awda towers about two kilometres away."* Nabeel explains that their area, al-'Awda, was relatively calm in comparison. However: *"I could hear a number of explosions all over; drone and F16 planes, and Apache helicopters were constantly hovering in the sky."*

Nabeel had just finished Maghreb prayer in the mosque when he heard a deafening explosion. Terrified, he postponed his plan to offer condolences to bereaved friends in Beit Hanoun and headed home to Tower 3. Overhearing some young men gathering outside Tower 8, 50 metres from his tower, he asked his friend standing nearby what had happened. *"He said a shell, presumably fired by an Israeli tank from al-'Atara and as-Salatin area, had hit Tower 8; precisely the flat of Yahia Abu Qamar on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor."*

Nabeel was relieved to hear there had been no casualties: *"Yahia is my neighbour. He is an ordinary person, not in the resistance. He has no political affiliation. I think the shell was fired randomly."* As they stood there talking another shell hit, Tower 7 this time. He watched in horror as rubble poured down on the crowd below. *"It was frightening and terrifying explosion because most of al-'Awda towers residents had gathered in front of Tower 8. Rubble started falling from Tower 7 and injured a number of neighbours. Until that moment, I hadn't noticed my son Iyad among the youngsters."* Suddenly, he heard one of the young men mention Iyad's name. Running after them, he caught sight of his son being carried on a stretcher towards the main street, his face covered. Scanning his body, he couldn't see any injuries. *"I looked but I couldn't find where he had been injured; his chest, abdomen, and part of his face; the nose and chin, were fine. Neither of his legs were injured either."*

Getting into the ambulance with his son, he noticed the blood soaking through the clothes covering his son's face. In the hospital the full extent of his injuries became apparent; *"When we arrived at Kamal Odwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya, I saw the top of Iyad's head. His brain was hanging out. Doctors pronounced him dead immediately."*

Despite Nabeel's care to prevent his children leaving the flat and straying into danger during Operation Cast Lead, Iyad had left to help his neighbour Yahia when their flat had been hit, Nabeel told DCI. Then he had come down and joined the bystanders between the two towers, but he was the only one killed by the falling rubble.