

Operation Cast Lead: Cousins killed while playing marbles during ceasefire hours

“I still remember the incident and I can't forget it. I even see it in my dreams. I don't know why my son and my nephew were targeted while they were playing.”



Left to right: Abed al-Rahman and his cousin Mahmoud, both aged 13 at the time they were killed.

At 3:00pm on 13 January 2009, as Mohammad Jaballah watched his son, Mahmoud (13) and nephew, Abed al-Rahman (13) playing marbles on the street, he decided to leave them. It was ceasefire, and there was no obvious danger. They didn't get much chance to play outside otherwise. Mahmoud and his family lived in as-Sekka Street in Jabalia Camp, North Gaza. His cousin, Abed a-Rahman lived close by. As the cousins played, two men rushed past and disappeared up a side-street. A drone plane circling overhead seemingly targeted them and an explosion

shook the area. Mohammad ran to the children and found them critically injured, their legs blown off and bleeding heavily. Mahmoud was taken to hospital and pronounced dead at 6:30pm. Abed al-Rahman was already dead. Speaking to DCI the following December, Mohammad said he could not forget the horrific scene of the children's bodies blown apart.

The following information is based on an affidavit taken by DCI-Palestine from Mahmoud's father, Mohammad Jaballah, on 22 December 2009:

On 13 January 2009, around 3:00pm Mohammad Jaballah (30) looked at his son, Mahmoud (13) and nephew, Abed al-Rahman (13) playing marbles on the street near their house and thought: *“Let them play because they have been stuck inside the house the whole day and it's the ceasefire; there's no danger despite the constant circling of the drone plane overhead.”*

Mahmoud Jaballah lived with his father, Mohammad, in as-Sekka Street, Block 4, Jabalia Camp in North Gaza and his grandfather, his grandmother Fatima, his mother and siblings; Fatima (~13), Samar (~11), Ameer (~9), Fathi (~7), and Afnan (~5). Mahmoud's cousin, Abed a-Rahman lived very close to them.

Mohammad explains that when Operation Cast Lead started, on 27 December 2008, Israeli planes started targeting Hamas affiliated buildings, and during the ground offensive stage, starting on 3 January 2009, Izbet Abed Rabbo and al-Kashef Mountains, 500 metres away were invaded by tanks. His children were terrified: *“The children were suffering psychologically. They kept screaming and would only sleep in my arms or the arms of their mother or grandmother because of the fear and terror of the explosions and the flaming bombs that were being dropped on the block and on as-Sekka Street.”*

On 13 January, Mohammad left the house around 3:00pm, during the ceasefire hours, and walked towards al-Kawthar pharmacy on the crossroads of as-Sekka Street with at-Trens Street 20 metres away from his house where he had seen his friends and neighbours chatting: he wanted

to join them. Not paying too much attention to the drone plane circling overhead, as it had been there since the beginning of the offensive, Mohammad spotted his son and nephew playing marbles in the street, 40 metres away.

As he was reassuring himself that there was no danger for the children he saw two men walking briskly down the street past Mahmoud and Abed al-Rahman and disappear up a side street. The drone plane got louder, preparing to launch an attack. *“Just then, there was a huge explosion shaking the area. It was so close that I felt as if the missile had landed beside me.”* He ran for cover but remembering the children he turned to look for them. He found them lying on the ground badly injured. *“When I approached Mahmoud, I saw his legs had been blown off and his head was bleeding profusely. Both of Abed al-Rahman's legs had been blown off too. But the children were still alive. They were moving on the ground. Their breathing sounded like snoring.”*

As Mohammad shouted for an ambulance, no one dared approach them for fear of attracting another attack. When Abed al-Rahman stopped breathing, Mohammad's fear grew for his son: *“As I grabbed Mahmoud my hands and my whole body was shivering. I grabbed his face; he was in great pain and making noises like snoring.”* Mohammad watched his friend Abed pick up Mahmoud and carry him, with the help of another man, to hail a passing car. *“I was feeling dizzy and my legs were shaking. I couldn't catch up with Abed. I saw him pulling over a car and rushing off towards the hospital. I pulled over another car and asked the driver to take me to Kamal Odwan Hospital.”* Mahmoud was admitted to surgery but by 6:30pm was pronounced dead. Abed al-Rahman had already died.

Speaking to DCI the following December, Mohammad is haunted by the scenes of his son and nephew's death. He can't understand why the children were directly attacked, during ceasefire hours, while playing marbles in the street: *“I still remember the incident and I can't forget it. I even see it in my dreams. I don't know why my son and my nephew were targeted while they were playing.”*

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