

## Operation Cast Lead: Child killed outside supermarket on way home from mosque



On 5 January 2009, Mohammad Abu Qamar decided to move his family from their house in Block 4 of Jabalia Camp to his uncle's house one kilometre away. He had spent a terrifying week since Operation Cast Lead was launched, with Hamas affiliated buildings only 500 metres from his house targeted by the Israeli army. Since the start of the ground offensive two days previously, tanks had invaded the nearby regions of Izbet Abed Rabbo and al-Kashef Mountain. The escalation of attacks on his neighbourhood, especially in Block 4, prompted him to move to his uncle's. His son Mahmoud wanted to go to the Mosque first, and was supposed to come straight to his uncle's house afterwards. When Mohammad heard of a strike at 7:00pm he was relieved to hear that the victims were unknown to him. However as time passed and Mahmoud didn't come home, Mohammad got more and more worried. He spent the next day looking everywhere for his son and finally found him in the morgue of Shifa Hospital. His legs and right hand had been blown off and there were shrapnel wounds in his neck. He had been one of the victims of the 7:00pm attack but not identified properly.

The following information is based on an affidavit taken by DCI-Palestine from Mahmoud's father Mohammad Abu Qamar on 16 December 2009:

Mahmoud Abu Qamar (14) lived on at-Trens Street in Block 4 of Jabalia Camp, North Gaza. It was an old three-roomed house with an asbestos and corrugated iron roof, not sturdy enough to withstand any of the shelling that was common in their neighbourhood during Operation Cast Lead. On the first day the Hamas affiliated buildings, 500 metres from his house were targeted by three missiles, sending waves of fear and panic through his family.

After a week of living in fear and terror of attack, the ground offensive stage on 3 January, brought an escalation of dangers, as Izbet Abed Rabbo and al-Kashef Mountain, one kilometre away, were invaded, Israeli tanks used this strategic position to launch shells at Jabalia Camp, particularly Block 4, where Mahmoud's family lived. *"Most of the residents living near as-Sekka Street fled their houses because of the shells fired towards their houses. This made my children scream and cry most of the time, especially at night. Their life and mine turned into a living hell."*

On 5 January, following the lead of nearly all his neighbours, Mohammad decided to move his children; Hanan (18), Ahmad (17), Mahmoud (14), and Yousif (12) and his wife to a safer place. He decided upon his uncle Basheer Abu Qamar's house on at-Trens Street, one kilometre from where they lived. *"His place was much safer than mine, as it is made entirely of concrete."*

Mahmoud however refused to go. He insisted on first going to the Mosque to pray. His father begged him to come to his uncle's house directly after praying as it was too dangerous to stay outside. Mohammad and family arrived at Basheer's around 5:00pm and as it got darker and darker, drone planes continued circling overhead,

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as tanks shelled non-stop. When he heard about an explosion nearby at 7:00pm he didn't allow himself to worry too much as he heard it had killed two people he didn't know. *"At around 7:00pm, the tension and fear grew greater when a house west of us was bombed. I heard that the explosion was caused by a missile fired from a drone plane, targeting a group of people near Rab'a Supermarket north of at-Trens Street. I was told that the bombing had injured two people I didn't know."*

However as time passed and night fell, Mohammad's fear grew. He couldn't think of anything else but his son Mahmoud: *"I was worried sick, but I didn't know where he had gone or where to look for him. In addition to that, it was too dangerous to go out: I couldn't leave the house to look for him at that late hour."* He spent a sleepless night worrying anxiously: *"I stayed up my uncle's house the entire night thinking of Mahmoud, wondering 'Where did he go? Where's he going to sleep?' I said to myself 'He must have gone to my house to spend the night there, but I locked the door before leaving and he won't be able to open it.' I stayed up all night thinking of him and waiting for the daylight."*

When daylight came he spent the day going from hospital to hospital looking for his son to no avail. At 4:00 he took the morbid decision to personally search Shifa Hospital Morgue, in case he was there unidentified. This time, he found Mahmoud. *"While looking among the fatalities in the morgue I found my son Mahmoud."* Mahmoud's identity had been confused: he was carrying a card with a different name. His father examined him; *"His lower limbs had been blown off. There was shrapnel in his neck and his right hand was missing."*

Mohammad buried his son the next day.

When he spoke to DCI the following December he explained that he didn't return home until the war ended. When it did, they all came home but without Mahmoud. *"I stayed at my uncle's house until the end of the Israeli war. On 18 January 2009, I returned to my house on at-Trens Street in Jabalia Camp. I returned to the house with my family after losing my son Mahmoud."*

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