

## Operation Cast Lead: Child killed in repeated direct airstrike while resting under a tree

*“I realized that they were targeting us”*



Osama Abu Riaileh (16)

**On 11 January 2009, around 10:45am Khaled Abu Rjaileh was sitting in a field with his sons Osama (16) and Sami (14), his brother Kamal (20) and his nephew Ayman (15). He had stopped there to pray before entering his aunt’s house in the Rumeida area in Khan Younis. He had brought his children there from Khuza'a village in fear of their safety. Having cycled for over two hours Osama and Kamal were resting under trees, three metres apart, when a missile hit Osama’s back. Khaled believes it was from a drone plane. Another three missiles followed, directly aimed at each of them, the fourth throwing Khaled into the air but not injuring him. Sami and Ayman managed to escape, with injuries. Kamal escaped unscathed. Osama had been killed.**

Khaled Abu Rjaileh decided to move his older sons, Osama (16) and Sami (15), from their house in Khuza'a village in Khan Younis to his aunt’s house in Bani Shaila village in Khan Younis on 11 January 2009. The previous day he had sent his younger sons, Hazem (8) and Hamzi (5) and his daughters Islam (13) and Isra' (10) with his wife to their grandfather’s house. He took this decision fearing attack during the ground offensive stage of Operation Cast Lead. *“I had heard that the Israeli Army was killing people in Jabalia and Gaza.”*

At around 8:30am a large party set off on bicycles for the village: *“The children and I rode bicycles because transportation was almost impossible that day due to the ground invasion and bombing. My brothers Kamal (20) and Jamal (33) and my nephews, including Ayman (15), came with us. We all headed to al-'Awda School in Bani Shaila village.”* Meeting a friend along the way, they stopped to share a roadside coffee around 10:30am at the junction of Abu Ishaq in the Rumeida area.

Concerned about the drone planes constantly overhead, Khaled decided it would be safer to split up for the rest of the journey and divided the party into two groups. *“My brother, Kamal, and my nephew, Ayman, came with me and the children, whereas the rest took another road.”* Within another 15 minutes they had almost reached their destination, Khaled suggested that they wash and pray before entering his aunt’s house. *“We cycled for about 15 minutes; until we reached our land near my aunt's house at 10:45am.”* *“Before going into my aunt's house, let's rest in the land, do our ablutions and perform the noon prayer,” I said to the children.”*

Osama and Kamal went to turn on a nearby tap for Khaled’s ablutions, and then each sat down to rest under two separate trees, roughly three metres apart. Suddenly, Osama was hit in the back by what his father describes as: *“a missile fired from a drone plane.”* As he ran toward his son, another missile was fired: this time at Kamal. Fortunately, Kamal moved quickly, and dodged the attack. Deciding that they were being targeted, Khaled shouted at Sami and Ayman to run away. As they tried to escape, a third missile sent shrapnel flying into Sami’s waist and left leg. Khaled headed for shelter in a nearby cave, but he was thrown to the ground by the fourth missile.

He lay there, immobile, afraid that if he moved he would provoke another attack. In the meantime, a car came by, stopped beside Osama and took him away.” Fortunately, Khaled didn’t have to wait long for help; *“About five minutes later, an ambulance came and stopped beside me. I was still lying on the ground; though I was fine.”*

The ambulance drove him to Naser Hospital in Khan Younis where he was told that Osama had died and that Sami and Ayman were both injured: *“Sami’s waist and left leg were injured. Ayman was injured in his right thigh and was fine. My brothers came, accompanied with Kamal, who had managed to escape miraculously. I lost my eldest son, Osama.”*

When Khaled spoke to DCI in September 2009 he stated simply: *“After the end of the war, I returned to my house with my wife and my children but without Osama.”*

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