

## Operation Cast Lead: Three children in direct airstrike on their home as they sleep

*"I have no idea why he was targeted. I mean he is an electrician and has no political or military activities and neither do his children."*



Left to right: Sedqi, Ahmad and Mohammad al-'Absi (pictures taken some time ago)

**On 29 December 2008, the al-'Absi were watching TV when their house was bombed by an F16. Father, Zeyad, mother 'Afaf and children Neda' (~20), Feda (~19), Mahmoud (~18), Zakiya (15), Mohammad (14), Ahmad (12), Sedqi (4) and Ne'ma (2) lived in Yebna Camp, Rafah. At around 1:00am, a missile destroyed their house. Sedqi, Ahmad and Mohammad were thrown out of the house and killed. Zeyad, 'Afaf and Ne'ma were blown onto the roof. Zakiya suffered serious injuries to her arm. In December 2009 she was awaiting plastic surgery, her father unsure if she would be allowed to leave Gaza for treatment. Ne'ma and Feda were also seriously injured. Their mother lay in a coma months after the incident, her husband staying with her in Egypt, leaving the bereft siblings alone. Only Mahmoud, who was in another room at the time of the strike was unharmed. The surviving family members now live in Tal as-Sultan in Rafah.**

On 29 December 2009 at around 1:00pm, Mohammad (14), Ahmad (12) and Sedqi (4) al-'Absi were watching television with their family. They lived in Yebna Camp in Rafah City with their father, Zeyad (45), mother, 'Afaf (~42) and siblings Neda' (~20), Feda (~19), Mahmoud (~18), Zakiya (15), and Ne'ma (2).

They had just returned from a relative's house, where their father had sent them for the night. Zeyad had been really concerned about the effect Operation Cast Lead had been having on his children psychologically, now when he heard that the Rafah Municipality building, 700 metres away would be targeted he decided to move them. *"My children were in a highly nervous state, it really frightened me. They would shout whenever they heard any explosion far away and I wondered what would happen to them if there was an explosion in the municipality building nearby. I therefore asked my wife to take the children to Omar aj-Jazzar's house, 200 metres north of my house."*

His wife and children left around 10:20pm, and he sat outside his house, chatting to neighbours. When he heard a large explosion nearby around 10:15, he was quite calm about it, as it was expected. His wife returned at 12:30, telling him that she had heard the Rafah Municipality building had been bombed, so now that the danger had passed; there was no point in staying in the overcrowded cousin's house.

Zeyad relaxed a little; *“The situation was very quiet and calm. My children my wife and I entered the house. Mahmoud went to his room, whereas my wife, the rest of the children and I went to my room to watch the news on television.”* Zeyad describes the sensation of falling asleep, and the dream-like state in which he experienced the attack on his house.

*“We were watching the news, and suddenly I started feeling sleepy and I actually fell asleep for a few seconds. I felt as if I was living in a dream where I was injured and my left arm buried under rubble. I pulled it out but I wasn't fully conscious of what I was going through. Then, I felt men carrying me, calling and shouting, but I wasn't really aware of what was going on.”*

His neighbour Adnan (46) remembers being woken up by the explosion. He *“suddenly woke up to the sound of an enormous explosion shaking the entire area and smashing the glass of the windows and knocking over some furniture.”* Checking first on his terrified, screaming children, he ran out to the street to find out what had happened: *“Zeyad's house had been destroyed. I realized then that the Israeli F16 planes had targeted their house.”* Zeyad's son Mahmoud (18) staggered out, covered in dust. He was soon followed by daughter, Feda' (19), who emerged from the rubble with an arm injury. Adnan and some neighbours rushed inside to rescue the rest of the family. It was not long before they found Zakiya (15) half covered in rubble, and Neda (20) lying unconscious with a head injury. As the search continued they were joined by fire-fighters, who found Zeyad, his wife and daughter Ne'ma, having been blown onto on the roof of the bathroom.

Adnan followed Zeyad's family to the hospital, waiting anxiously for news of the rest of the family. He couldn't contain his grief and horror when he heard that three of Zeyad's sons had been found in the street, thrown seven metres from the house in the blast. *“I completely collapsed: I couldn't believe what had happened to my neighbour.”*

Zeyad woke up at 6:00am confused and disorientated: *“I woke up and found myself inside Abu Yousif an-Najjar Hospital, with a broken body covered with dust, in a great pain and with a big cut on my face. My left arm, back and head were stitched. What had happened? How did it happen? I didn't know. Was I dreaming?”* It was only when his nephew, Iyad, visited the next day that he discovered the truth. An Israeli F16 had bombed his house and Mohammad, Ahmad and Sedqi had been killed. Zeyad insisted on visiting his children in the morgue. He was brought down in a wheelchair to fight his way among the crowds saying goodbye to their dead. *“I kissed them and said goodbye to them. Then, Iyad took me back to my room in the hospital. I was grief-stricken.”* When his wife was transferred to Egypt for treatment, still in a coma, Zeyad went with her and stayed by her side for four months until she woke up. Mahmoud was the only one to have emerged unscathed.

When Zeyad spoke to DCI-Palestine a year after the incident his family were still profoundly affected by the bombing. His daughter Zakiya was in a lot of pain, needing constant physiotherapy and awaiting plastic surgery on her arm, Zeyad worrying she might not get a permit to leave Gaza for treatment, due to the closures imposed by Israel. Feda', Neda', and Ne'ma are completely traumatized by the event. Their house was destroyed and they now live with their uncle in Tal as-Sultan. They have lost a lot; their brothers, their home, and even their mother and father for the first four months after the bombing. Mohammad was the only sibling to have emerged unscarred.

The al-'Absi's neighbour, Adnan, cannot understand why this happened to his friend; *“I have no idea why he was targeted. I mean he is an electrician and has no political or military activities and neither do his children.”*