

Operation Cast Lead: Three children killed in direct attack as they picked sugarcane



Abed Rabbo al-Astal (8)

On 2 January 2009 Mohammad (11) was playing marbles with his brother Abed Rabbo (9) and cousin Abed as-Sattar (11) when they decided to go pick sugarcane. Despite the noise of constant bombing from drone and F16 planes overhead, their father, Iyad was trying to get some sleep, having risen early. The sounds of the children playing kept him awake, so when Mohammad ran inside, asking permission to go to the sugarcane fields, he gladly gave it. He managed to drop off for a few minutes, only to be woken by the sound of a nearby explosion around 2:15pm. Iyad was used to these sounds by now: Operation Cast Lead was now in its seventh day. It was only when he heard neighbours shouting outside that he got up, went out and realised what had happened. Rushing to the site he found the bomb crater; there was a small knife, sugar cane sticks and pieces of flesh next to it. In the morgue Iyad visited the

broken bodies of his children and nephew. When he spoke to DCI in August, he did not hide his grief, saying simply; “I miss my two sons very much.”

Iyad Abed Rabbo Musa al-Astal (32) didn’t object when his children and nephew asked permission to go to eat sugarcane on the family lands. The sugarcane fields lay 150 metres from their house in Khan Younis. Iyad had risen early to go to Friday prayer on 2 January 2009 and now wanted to get some rest.

He had returned from the mosque around lunchtime, finding his children, Abed Rabbo (9) and Mohammad (11) playing with their cousin, Abed as-Sattar Waleed al-Astal (11). They had lunch together then the children went off to play. Exhausted, he decided to rest. He didn’t find it easy to fall asleep; *“I tried to get some rest despite the noise of Israeli drone and F16 planes overhead. They had been crisscrossing the sky and bombing everything since 27 December 2008”*

Not only that but the sounds of his children playing marbles outside made sleeping impossible; so when Mohammad ran into the kitchen to ask if they could go pick sugarcane he didn’t see any harm in it. *“He told me he wanted to go to the land to eat some sugarcane, and I didn’t care that much. I went back to the room and tried to sleep.”*

He finally managed to catch a few moments sleep around 2:15, but not for long; *“I was woken up to the sound of an explosion nearby. I assume the explosion was caused by a missile fired from an Israeli drone plane. I didn’t know where it had landed exactly, somewhere near the house but not very close to it.”* He wasn’t too worried about the explosions, as those days they were all used to hearing frequent explosions since Operation Cast Lead had been launched on 27 December 2009.

When he overheard his neighbours outside shouting about fatalities, he ran outside. He knew something was badly wrong by their reaction; *“My neighbours gave me strange and confusing looks. Everyone was looking at me but saying nothing.”* One of his neighbours finally told him the horrific news; *“I approached one of them and asked him about the children. He said that the missile that caused the explosion we had heard earlier had hit them directly.”* Rushing to his land, he found: *“ambulances and many people gathering around a small hole. Next to the hole left by the missile laid evidence that the children had been there:*

“Beside the hole there were small pieces of flesh, a knife and some sugarcane sticks.” It would appear that they had been directly attacked while cutting the sugarcane.

Iyad went to morgue to see his children and take them home. Their bodies bore the marks of the explosion; *“I immediately headed to Naser Hospital in Khan Younis where I saw my children in the morgue. I saw Abed Rabbo who had died of a head injury. Abed as-Sattar also had a head injury and his right arm was missing; having being blown off in the blast. Then, I saw Mohammad; he had injuries all over his body.”*

When Iyad spoke to DCI-Palestine on 17 August 2009, only a few words were necessary to convey the grief he still feels: *“I miss my two sons very much.”*

Three children were killed in the direct attack:

- Mohammad Iyad Abed Rabbo al-Astal (9)
- Abed Rabbo Iyad Abed Rabbo al-Astal (11)
- Abed as-Sattar Waleed Abed al-Raheem al-Astal (11)

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