

## Operation Cast Lead: 12 children killed in ‘mistake’ air strike on their home



*Photo credit: AP / Fadi Adwan*

**On 27 December 2008, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead with targeted air strikes followed by a ground invasion amidst continued bombardment from land and sea. The al-Zeitoun neighbourhood, south of Gaza City, where the ad-Dayah family lived, was severely and continuously bombarded. On 6 January 2009, at around 5:45am the ad-Dayah family’s three-storey house was struck in an F16s attack. Most of the family was at home; 22 were killed including 12 children.**

The information below is based on an affidavit collected by DCI-Palestine from Reda Fayez Mesbah ad-Dayah, relative of the victims, on 25 January 2009:

The ad-Dayah family lived in a three-storey house overlooking Salah ad-Deen Street in al-Zeitoun neighbourhood, in the southern part of Gaza City. Heavy aerial bombardments had been pounding the area since the start of Israel’s Operation Cast Lead on 27 December 2008.

The ad-Dayah family house had two flats on each floor. The ground floor was inhabited by Fayez (61), his wife Kawkab (60), and children Raghda (37), Sabrin (24), Radwan (23) and Reda (22) who talked to DCI. On the first floor lived Reda’s brother Iyad (36), his wife Rawda (32) and children Ali (10), Khetam (8), Ala (6), Sharaf al-Deen (4), Rab’a (2) and Mohammad (7 months). On the same floor lived Reda’s brother Ramez, his wife Haifa (21) and children Bara (1) and Salsabil (4 months). On the second floor lived Mohammad al-Dayi (29), his wife Nezal (29) and children Amani (6), Qamar (5), Areej (3), and Yousif (2). Nezal was seven months pregnant. On the same floor: Reda’s brother Amer (27). Finally, on the third floor lived Reda’s brother Nafez (38), his wife Islam (31) and children Aya (14), Fayez (12), Hamzi (10), Sondos (8), Saja (6), Ahmad (5) and Sama (1).

On 3 January 2009, Nafez, his wife and their seven children left the house to go to a relative’s house in al-Sha’f, which they thought was safer. On 4 January, 61-year-old Fayez ad-Dayah made his entire family move to a relative’s house in al-Sabra, about two kilometres away, but the family returned home the next day, on 5 January, despite the fact that their neighbourhood was still dangerous, because the house was too crowded. At 6:00pm the same day, Reda went to a friend’s house, about 250 metres away, leaving his entire family at home, except his brother Nafez and Nafez’s family, who had already fled. Reda slept over at his friend’s house, as it was safer than walking the streets under aerial bombardment. The next day a heavy explosion took place in the neighbourhood. Reda told DCI-Palestine:

*On 6 January 2009, at around 5:45am, a heavy explosion took place in the area. A minute later, people started shouting 'ad-Dayah family! ad-Dayah family!' I could not wait, so I rushed out of my friend's house although F16s were hovering in the sky. Once I left the house, I saw dust filling the street and I could no longer see. I ran unconsciously towards my house while still hearing people shouting "ad-Dayah house!" I was about 100 metres away from the house when I looked at it and saw stones. People were shouting and some of them were running with me.*

Reda found his brother Amer (27) on the ground; he was covered in blood but still alive; he was shouting and pointing to where his brother Radwan was. Radwan (23) was unconscious. At that time many ambulances arrived and the fire department began putting out the fire in the house.

*At around 6:00am, while the neighbours were helping us with the search, I decided to go and look in neighboring houses. I found my sister Sabrin (24) on the ground floor of the house of the Sa'd family. The house is across the street south of our house... She was on her side with her clothes torn apart completely. Pages of the holy Quran were still in her hands. Apparently, the pages were torn while she was carrying the holy Quran. Her entire body was almost burnt. I however recognized her because she always carried the holy Quran in her hand. I shouted at an ambulance and they came and covered her and took her to the hospital.*

*We found only small pieces; we could not know to whom they belonged. We put them in plastic bags anyway and buried them in the cemetery at the end of the day.*

In another neighbouring house, Reda found the upper part of his mother's body (Kawkab) and took it to the ambulance. At this point, his brother Mohammad (29) joined him; luckily, Mohammad had gone praying at the time of the attack. Then, a heavy digger arrived and started to remove rubble in order to recover the bodies:

*The digger started to open holes to get into the ground floor. We immediately found the body of my father, Fayez ad-Dayah (61). The body was one piece but there was a hole at the top of the head. Because we found my father in that place, we all thought that the rest of the family would be somewhere close to him [...] At around*

*6:15am, I found my brother Iyad holding his children Mohammad and Khetam and sitting in a squat position. His left foot was amputated. The children were in front of him and his back was leant forward to shield them. We kept looking until we found Iyad's entire family. They were all maimed. The head of Rab'a (3) was above the rubble and her skull had been emptied from the top, her body was buried. Whenever we found something, we would put it inside an ambulance. I mean whenever we found a body, or pieces of a body, the ambulance would take it to hospital.*

The search continued until 2:30pm with help from the fire department, ministry of public works and neighbours. By then, at least 13 bodies had been recovered: Reda's brother Radwan (23), his brother Iyad (36), the upper body of Iyad's wife Rawda (32), and their children Ali (10), Khetam (8), Ala (6), Sharaf al-Deen (4), Rab'a (2) and Mohammad (7 months). Reda's father Fayez (61), Reda's sisters Raghda (37) and Sabrin (24), and the upper body of Bara (1), Ramez's daughter. At around 3:00pm, Reda went to Shifa hospital to retrieve the bodies and body parts and bury them. While at the cemetery, he received a telephone call from Shifa hospital asking him to come and get more body parts that had been recovered. All were buried in the open grave. Reda kept searching until dark in vain. During the next two days, 7-8 January, rubble was scattered over a 70-square-metre area and searched thoroughly. *We looked through the rubble and put what we*

*found in plastic bags. We found only small pieces; we could not know to whom they belonged. We put them in plastic bags anyway and buried them in the cemetery at the end of the day. We keep finding body pieces even now. So far we have recovered around 13 bodies. The rest are still missing under the rubble or were turned into small pieces.*

*To the best of my knowledge, my brother Ramez, his wife Safa and daughter Salsabil; Nizal, Mohammad's wife, and her children Areej and Yousif are still missing. I think they were blown into small pieces all over the place. We don't know what happened to them. [...] We currently live in a rented flat in al-Zeitoun neighbourhood after we lost the family, the house and the money. What is left of my family is Nafez, his wife and children because they were not in the house at the time of the incident. I am still alive with my brother Amer who got out from under the rubble. His ears and head injuries are still serious. He has refused to speak to anyone since the incident. You have to excuse him. This is very tough on him.*

DCI-Palestine met Reda again at the end of August. He told us that his brothers Amer and Mohammad were struggling to move on. *“Now we have no home to live in... We live in constant sadness and grief about what happened to us. We didn't do anything to deserve having our children and family killed, and becoming homeless.”*

In total, 12 children were killed in the attack:

- Salsabil Ramez Fayeze ad-Dayah (4 months)
- Mohammad Iyad Fayeze ad-Dayah (7 months)
- Bara Ramez Fayeze ad-Dayah (1)
- Rab'a Iyad Fayeze ad-Dayah (2)
- Yousif Mohammad Fayeze ad-Dayah (2)
- Areej Mohammad Fayeze ad-Dayah (3)
- Sharaf al-Deen Iyad Fayeze ad-Dayah (4)
- Qamar Mohammad Fayeze ad-Dayah (5)
- Amani Mohammad Fayeze ad-Dayah (6)
- Ala Iyad Fayeze ad-Dayah (6)
- Khetam Iyad Fayeze ad-Dayah (8)
- Ali Iyad Fayeze ad-Dayah (10)

According to a recent *Haaretz* article on military investigations carried out into attacks on civilians, the bombing of the ad-Dayah house was an “operational mistake”. The Israeli Air Force intended to strike a house that they believed was being used to store Hamas weapons. *“According to the investigation, the ad-Dayah home was several dozen metres away from the intended target. The error occurred because the pilot was given mistaken coordinates.”*<sup>1</sup>

*“The IDF described the incident as “saddening,” but emphasized that it stemmed from ‘a professional mistake that could happen during intensive fighting.’ A senior officer who was involved in the probes said, ‘We will not apologize for an operation in which only 10 of our soldiers lost their lives.’”*

**According to DCI-Palestine documentation, at least 352 children were killed as a result of Israeli military operations during Operation Cast Lead.**

DCI-Palestine, 5 September 2009

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<sup>1</sup> *Haaretz*, “Five IDF probes find 'operational errors,' but no intentional attacks on civilians in Gaza op” (24 August 2009): <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1080463.html>