



*Mohammad Abu Sweireh (16)*



*Mohammad 'Elaian (17)*

### **Operation Cast Lead: Two boys killed by an Apache Helicopter**

**On 30 December 2008, Nezar Kassab (18) and his family heard that Jihad Abu Sweireh's house had received phone calls threatening bombing. Residents from nearby houses fled to the as-Sawarhi neighbourhood, where Nezar lived. On 1 January 2009, Nezar (18) and Mohammad 'Elaian (17) went to work harvesting tomatoes in a greenhouse about 70 meters away from Jihad's house. About an hour later, they heard the sound of a home-made rocket being launched nearby. Thinking that Jihad Abu Sweireh's house may have just been bombed, they went to check. They saw smoke from the rocket launcher arising near another greenhouse 20 metres away. A group of young men, including Mohammad Abu Sweireh, had also gone to check what had happened. As there was an Israeli Apache helicopter hovering above them, they all started running to leave the open area. The helicopter fired on the children. Mohammad 'Elaian was dead on arrival at the hospital from shrapnel in his head. Mohammad Abu Sweireh was taken to Saudi Arabia for treatment, but also died from shrapnel wounds to his head and body. Nezar was severely injured but recovered.**

The following information is based on two affidavits taken from Mohammad Abu Sweireh's father, Maher Abu Sweireh (45), and the children's friend, Nezar Kassab (18), on 11 February 2010.

On 30 December 2009, the neighbourhood of as-Sawarhi began hearing threats that the house of Jihad Abu Sweireh would be targeted for bombing because he was a police officer affiliated with Hamas.

On 1 January 2009, in spite of hearing shells falling everywhere and planes hovering in the sky, Mohammad 'Elaian (17) and Nezar Kassab (18) went to work harvesting tomatoes in a greenhouse about 70 meters away from Jihad's house. About an hour later, they heard the sound of a homemade rocket being launched nearby. Thinking that the house of their relative, Jihad Abu Sweireh, may have just been bombed, they left the greenhouse. They looked to the east and saw that Jihad's house had not yet been bombed. They then saw smoke from the rocket launcher arising near another greenhouse 20 metres away.

Mohammad saw a group of young men who had come to the area also thinking that Jihad's house had been bombed. Mohammad and Nezar started running toward them when they were joined by Mohammad Abu Sweireh (16). Nezar followed behind Mohammad Abu Sweireh and Mohammad 'Elaian by about 2 metres. They slowed to a jogging pace, thinking they had left the open area. Nezar remembers: *"At that moment, there was an Israeli Apache helicopter hovering in the sky. I thought it was at a higher altitude than it actually was. I looked at it while I was running and saw it hovering in the*

*sky and heard its loud sound. [ . . . ] I suddenly felt myself fly through the air and slam to the ground. I was no longer aware of what was happening around me. I recall breathing heavily and hearing shouting around me. “*

At around 4:00pm, Mohammad Abu Sweireh’s mother called his father, Maher, to inform him of their son’s hospitalisation in Shuhada’al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir Al Balah. Upon arrival, Maher learned that his son was in critical condition with shrapnel in his brain. The doctors told Maher they couldn’t do anything for him. He would need to be sent to Saudi Arabia for proper treatment. He was also informed that Mohammad ‘Elaian was dead instantly because of his head injury and that Nezar was in the intensive care unit.

Mohammad Abu Sweireh was rushed to the Rafah crossing point and transferred to an Egyptian ambulance that took him to El Arish Airport, where a Saudi Airplane was waiting. On the following day, 4 January 2009, Mohammad was operated upon in order to remove the shrapnel from his brain. Maher explains: *“The operation lasted about five hours and the same doctor told me that Mohammad was still in critical condition and must stay in the intensive care unit. I visited him twice per day according to the visiting hours even though he was still in a coma.”*

After the operation, Mohammad Abu Sweireh was taken to the intensive care unit. On 18 January 2009, after 14 days in the intensive care unit, he was pronounced dead. Speaking to DCI in February 2010, Maher recounts: *“The hospital arranged things very quickly and I left Saudi Arabia to El Arish Airport on 20 January 2009. On the same day, I returned to the Gaza Strip and came home around 3:00pm and buried Mohammad amidst grief and sorrow. My family hoped he would come back home better after his trip for treatment, but his destiny was different. Praise be to Allah for everything.”*

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