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Gaza family says Israeli soldier shot children



Souad Abed Rabbo ... wounded.

Jason Koutsoukis in Gaza City
January 24, 2009

SOUAD ABED RABBO was in her apartment on the edge of the Jabalya refugee camp near the Israeli border on January 7 when the call came from Israeli soldiers for everyone in the area to come outside.

Her apartment had been bombed, and there was an Israeli tank unit approaching the building.

"We started coming outside of the apartment, and we were waving white flags to show that we were not fighters," she said through a translator yesterday.

Among the first to exit the building were one of her sons, Khaled, and his wife and three daughters, Amal, 2, Sammer, 4, and Souad, 7.

Two soldiers were standing on either side of the tank outside the house, she said. Another of her sons, Husam, told the *Herald* that one of the soldiers was an officer.

"They were standing there just looking at us, and they were eating chips and one had chocolate and they were talking to each other," Husam said.

"We were waiting for about 10 minutes for directions on where we should go."

Husam and another son, Ahmed, said a third soldier rose from inside the tank, holding his rifle.

Their mother says she did not see the third soldier until he started shooting.

"He did it very slowly," Ahmed said. "He took careful aim at the little girls, and shot Amal and Souad three times. Sammer started running back up the steps toward the house and he shot her also."

Their grandmother started shouting, trying to push her son, Khaled, the father of the two shot girls, and his wife, back into the house. She was also shot, three times.

One bullet passed through her upper arm, another passed through her torso underneath her rib cage, and another was lodged in her abdomen.

Ahmed, Husam, and another son, Farj, recall that their mother and the three girls were dragged inside the house. "When the soldiers realised that two of the girls were dead, they said Khaled could take her to the hospital,"

Khaled starting shouting for help.

One neighbour who heard him was Ehab al-Asheikh, an ambulance driver, who told the *Herald* he went outside to see what had happened.

"I wanted to use the ambulance to drive Khaled to the hospital but I was prevented from doing so by the soldiers," he said.

Khaled said the soldiers told him he could take his daughter to the hospital, and he set off on foot with Sammer in his arms. His wife walked with him, carrying one of the dead girls, and another brother, Ibrahim, carried the second dead girl.

Sammer was taken to Shifa hospital, then transferred to a hospital in Egypt and is now in intensive care in a hospital in Belgium and reportedly has severe spinal injuries.

The Israeli Defence Forces later destroyed the building, and all the other residential buildings in the neighbourhood.

Ehad al-Asheikh showed the *Herald* his ambulance which, was crushed almost beyond recognition underneath the rubble of his former home.

An Israeli military spokesman, Captain Benjamin Rutland, said the allegations were being treated seriously and being investigated.

"With regard to this particular incident, this is being investigated at the very highest levels of the IDF," Captain Rutland said. "It is a very thorough investigation."

Captain Rutland stressed that at no stage did the IDF target civilians.

Khaled Abed Rabbo showed pictures of the dead girls taken on his mobile phone. He also claims that he has video footage of the girls, taken after they had died, but this was not shown to the *Herald*.

Khaled Abed Rabbo is on the payroll of the Palestinian Authority based in the West Bank city of Ramallah, as a policeman. The family is associated with the Fatah movement of the Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, and is not believed to have any connections to Hamas.

He is demanding a full inquiry and wants the chance to present his own evidence.

"Why do they come after us?" Khaled asked the *Herald*. "We are not militants here. We are not

Hamas. We are just ordinary people.

"Somebody did this to my daughters and I want the world to know what is going on here."

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