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Women's Affairs Center - Gaza

Holes in the robe of justice



Palestine 2015

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My Story with the Offensive

Only a few days remain before the ominous anniversary of the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip last year in 2014. The offensive remains etched in our memory, a painful memory that refuses to be forgotten. For how will it be forgotten when its implications still remain in sight?

Nearly a year has passed and the circumstances remain the same. Tears still shedding for dear martyrs, thousands injured have not yet recovered, thousands displaced from their homes living in extremely difficult conditions, and homes still lying in destruction.

Pain increases day by day, especially with the deterioration of the political, economic, and social conditions. Losses in lives and money continue to eise because of the blockade and the closure of border crossing, disrupting any plan of reconstruction. The reconciliation government was formed a year ago and did nothing, although it was created for this purpose.

A year passed and everything is as it is since the offensive. A year passed and we have not forgotten for one moment what happened to us from devastation and destruction. We feel as if the offensive was yesterday and not before a year. Just try to open the subject of the offensive with any person, a woman, a man, a child; they will narrate the story in details, and they will bring back the psychological state they were in at that time, or, maybe worse. Each has his story and his own recitation with sharp painful details as if he's still living it. In fact, he is still living it.

300 stories are documented in this book; for women who lived through the offensive in 2014, it all indicates – clearly and detailed-to crimes committed by the occupation against Palestinian civilians; when Israel completely disregarded the international law.

300 crimes out of thousands of crimes, but more than a million crimes; so Israel committed a war crime against every Palestinian in the Gaza strip. 300 stories told by women with their own tongues; they narrated it because they are the largest number of victims of this offensive.

“My Story with the Offensive” is an addition to the number of stories of the women. My story began from the first moments of the offensive. As for everyone else, it brought back the painful memory of the two previous offensives less than six years before. My story of displacement was a bitter story, but my story on the last day of the offensive was the most bitter. The Israeli Occupation used the usual style of intimidation to make people flee in the border areas such as: Shijia, Sha’af, Beit Hanoun and others through phones and flyers to force them to leave their homes and evacuate because “the whole region will be destroyed” according to the what the flyers say.

According to our experience in the 50 days (after the demolition of houses on the heads of their inhabitants, and the destruction of the towers, and the wiping out of areas of the face of the earth), it was not just a threat.

It was a difficult time for me, I walked around the house as if I was saying goodbye but I really was saying goodbye! I tried to pick up some things with me before I left it but I couldn't because I wanted to take everything. I open my closet to take some of my clothes; I want all of it, but time is running out so I close the closet without taking anything.

The voices of my children are getting louder: “What do we take with us? I want this! And this! And that!” I said, “Take what you want, what you love, and be assured that we will not come back to this house and we will not find anything!”

We were wandering in the house and the voices of the neighbors were rising saying, “Theres no time!” Danger is near! Hurry let's run, scream, weep, mourn, flee our homes! However, we won't fail to return. We will return, because we are the owners of this house, we are the owners of right, and the owners of this motherland!

Amal Syam

Director of Women's Affairs Center



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- **Stories of women during the Israeli Offensive on the Gaza Strip which lasted from July 7, 2014 until August 26, 2014**
 - **A report on Israeli violations of international humanitarian law during this massive offensive entitled: “Women Pay the Price of the Offensive”**

(Women of Palestine) Radio... A Child that Will not Die

A young woman, unique in her style, likes to wear colorful clothes. Her beautiful smile does not leave her lips. She charms you with the way she talks. She fills you with hope and ambition. She does not sleep only to dream, but also to wake up and works to make her dreams come true. She is passionate about humanitarian work, and working as a journalist and researcher.

Islam Al Barrar, an active journalist from Gaza, had her dream destroyed by the Israeli occupation when they bombed Burj Al Basha in Gaza City during its last attack on Gaza. It was the building that had the radio station that she spent her life and money and effort to build, for it to be the first and only radio that airs in the name of the thoughts and ideas of the women in Gaza. Islam and her family moved to Gaza, leaving her house in El Sheikh Zayed City in the north of Gaza, after it was announced to be a closed military area by the Israeli Army. Islam did not like staying home, so she went out even though her family was worried about her. She went out to do the job she likes the most. She risked her life to do volunteer work and help everyone who needed help. She did it by herself to serve her loved country. She was also the manager of (Women of Gaza) radio.

Islam began thinking about having her own project in 2010 after having her bachelor degree in journalism, but finding a job was very difficult, so she became interested in women cases through working as a field researcher for more than five years, where she felt the need to create a platform made especially to care for the struggle of women and activate their ignored role in the Palestinian community. Islam said, "When I graduated from college, I did not find a suitable job, so I began to think of my own project, which is a center for journalism training. From that center the dream got bigger, until I made a high level media staff that I supervised personally, to have a radio special for discussing all the social issues from a pure feminine perspective, and

away from partisan and framing."

The radio was for Islam the child she never had. Her child who was killed by the occupation that aims to kill every Palestinian dream, but she strictly believed that dreams do not and will never die. She took care of it as a mother taking care of her daughter. She did great effort to make sure the radio, with its fourteen programs, successful. She would watch every detail on her own, as a type of caring, not dictatorship.

Islam confirms: "The broadcast's main goal was to spread awareness of the Palestinian woman's role in the community, and help her do that role to break the culture of ignorance and underestimation."

The news was not easy for Islam's heart to handle; she could not believe that her life was buried under the remnants of Burj El Basha. She had a psychological trauma that kept her from speaking for three days, then she began to realize what happened; the fact that there was nothing called (Women of Gaza Radio).

Islam said with a shaky sound: "So far I've seen the building fifty times, and every time I would still cry. I miss it and I miss my broadcast so much. If I had known that it would be destroyed, I would have taken a long look at it to say goodbye."

Regarding the crimes that were condemned by the IDF during its attack on Gaza Strip she comments: "The Israeli army did not come up with something new. This has been its policy since 1984 and until 2014, except it becomes fiercer and bloodier every time."

Islam sends a message to all the women to work hard to achieve their dreams, and to not let anything kill the ambitious in them. She said: "if my male society could not stop me from making my dream come true, the occupation would never be able to kill it. What happened will be a strong motivation to go back and start again. Over time you will see the birth of my dream again, and it will be stronger than before."

After the Attack... Al Kahlout's House falls Over the Children

On day 10 of the attack on Gaza, Al Kahlout family received a phone call from the Israeli intelligence telling them to completely evacuate their house in Jabalia immediately. Indeed, the evacuation happened and the IDF bombed the house but it only destroyed a small part of it.

After the war was over, and because of poverty, the family had to go back to their house and tried to fix it instead of renting a new home, especially that the upcoming winter did not allow them to live in a shelter. This family lived the suffering of all the Palestinian families from emigrating and going to a shelter to having their home destroyed and having to live in its ruins, but even after the war ended, this family lived another tragedy.

Two months after the attack, Um Yusuf, the grandmother, took her grandchildren to play in the back yard after it was cleaned after the war. As the children played, one of the yard walls (more than 3 meters high) fell over the children, and a metal board fell on the grandmother's shoulder.

Um Yusuf tells us what happened: "The wall collapsed before my eyes and I couldn't remove it. At that moment I yelled at the neighbors for help. I kept calling loudly." She continued: "I looked at Mosaab's face, my grandson, and all I could see was his small eyes. Everyone was screaming." The biggest part of the wall fell over Mosaab (two years old). The cement got his stomach and legs and broke some of his bones. Since then, and until now, Mosaab is having speech problems.

Mosaab was not the only one who had his legs broken; all of his cousins were injured as well. Some had their shoulder broken, some their arm and some their leg. Mosaab's son, Amani, said: "At first I thought Mosaab was dead and I looked for my daughter, Mennah, and I couldn't find her, and I was worried about the baby inside me, because I was with them in the yard."

These injuries put Al Kahlout's in a lot of struggles; the mothers now work on treating more than one child. Amani said: "I struggle a lot with Mosaab. He cries a lot. And Mennah now suffers from sleepwetting because of the fear she had witnessed."

The family now lives in a completely destroyed house that is uninhabitable. Um Yusuf said: "our house was uninhabitable because it was bombed once and the house next to us was destroyed as well, which damaged our house more, but in spite of all that we had to handle it and we lived in the house anyway because we did not have anywhere else to go. We did not expect the house would fall over our heads, and what hurts me the most is the child who screams in pain day and night."

Akram Abu Askar Put His Children in a Sewage Well to Protect them from the Bombs

At deadly moments experienced by Abu Askar's family during the Offensive, fear had pushed Akram, the father, to hold his five children and put them in a sewage hole in his house. He ignored the danger of germs and the narrow place and only wanted to protect them from the missiles.

The family lived a rough night, with no way to go out of that house that was surrounded by shells everywhere. The father holds his children tight and tells them that he will do anything to protect them. The solution was dangerous, but it was necessary. The father made strange moves; he brought jute bags and put his children in them while everybody looked at him with surprise. At that moment the screams were louder and the children began to hold us tightly, afraid of the intensity of explosions. Akram got out to the house yard and took some tools with him, and then he came back and asked his children to go with him to the yard, so they did. He opened the sewage well that he had emptied of dirty water, as he worked as a plumber, and began to put his children inside, one by one, and told them to handle it and not try to get out.

Leila, the young one, went inside after her father convinced her that it would protect her from the bombs. Leila said: "We were afraid of the insects and dirt around us. The well was dirty and full of insects and bad smell, and we could not handle all that. We were very tired of standing."

The girl continued: "We were so scared. The time would pass very slowly and the explosion sounds became louder. Every moment we would think that the house would collapse and we would go out and find no family, or the house would fall on the well and we would not be able to leave it."

Hanan, the mother, sighed, and described her situation at that time: "I was shocked and could not do anything but cry. My fear and worry about my children tore me down. Every minute I wanted to get out of the house and save them, but it was more dangerous outside."

The family had spent its night in that tragic situation; the father quietly goes to check on the children, while the mother stays still where she is, very worried about them. At dawn the artillery began, so the father hurried outside to get the children out.

After that, a new struggle happened, which is the horror of having the children catch a disease after that painful night. Hanan said: "I rushed to clean my children very well. Then I apologized a lot for doing what we did, but they understood that it was only to protect them."

The next day, the family went to the family house in Gaza City, but going to the sewage was an unforgettable experience for the parents, the children, and everyone who heard the story. Hanan said: "That day left so much pain inside me, but the only thing that consoled me was that my children were safe and nothing of what happened to the others around us had happened to them."

Amani, The Wife of a Martyr Before Turning 18

Amani Shurrab, 18, still cannot believe that her husband Waseem, 23, passed away while waiting for him to return to their home. Waseem left this world with his brother Iyad on July 26 after breaking their fast at one of their friend's house, confronting the barbarism of Operation Protective Edge. Waseem and Iyad used to live in a lovely 4 story house in Aldabet Aljumrukeyah east of Khan Yunis. It was fate that the dwellers of this household would leave their home to break their fast at a relative's house. Waseem and Iyad immediately returned back to the home after the Taraweeh prayers. Seconds after, Israeli occupying forces struck the home with a number of missiles destroying the house in its entirety. Waseem and Iyad both became martyrs.

Waseem's wife, Amani Shurrab, tells us, "While I was waiting for my husband to take me home from my parents' house, I was shocked when my neighbors called to notify me that my husband and his brother Iyad were murdered after our home was demolished and that they are now under its rubble.

Amani didn't believe the news and quickly went back to her home. But the sight of destruction confirmed what her neighbors had told her, grim sights full of the loss of her husband and the wreckage of her home. Amani fell unconscious because of the shock she had received and didn't leave the hospital for more than two months. Amani says, "My husband and his brother were close friends. It was destiny for them to leave together on Laylat Al Qadr (Night of Destiny). They had just broke their fast at one of our relative's homes who had invited them. With tears of pain and a muffled voice she said, "We were on the eve of celebrating our second anniversary. The memory came but my husband was gone. It came while I was still suffering from the loss of my home."

Amani had one daughter, Helen, and was in her last month of pregnancy when her husband passed away. Two weeks after his death Amani gave birth to her son, Waseem. She gave him that name to hold his father's name and memories. Waseem's birth alleviated some of the pain from the traumatic images Amani had. Amani clarifies, "I lived very difficult days before having Waseem. And the shock from my loss had affected me greatly. I opted for his father's name so that it can live forever. I hope that I will see in him the same qualities that I loved in my husband." Amani continues, "My brother-in-law managed to save our photo album from the rubble. I was so happy. Everyday I relive our beautiful memories by looking at these pictures and pursuing our traditions like preparing food together and playing with my daughter. These are unforgettable and irreversible memories."

Today Amani lives in her family's home. She thinks a lot about the future relating to raising her children. Sadness doesn't leave her heart. However, her persistence pushes her to raise her kids and continue her education.

Ameena Wonders... Why Marry Someone and Have Babies that Israel Will Kill?

Even though Ameena Al Dahdouh (25 years old) is still young, she was, just like thousands of young women and men who live in Gaza, devastated by the war and the tragic situations that affected them closely or from a far, so they lost hope in their future life.

Ameena lives in Al Dahadeeh area, a well-known place in Tal El Hawa in Gaza. The area is full of empty lands that Israel bombs everyday with missiles or artillery shells, so Ameena and her family had to leave the place to save their life.

She said angrily: "I spent the whole war asking myself one question: will I die or will I survive? – When I heard about the massacres caused by the Israeli occupation to the civilians and the safe families I would feel terrified for my family and loved ones, and I feared to become one of the war news."

The decision to leave home to a safer place was not among many other options. It was a solution forced by the dangerous situation, so they went to Ameena's grandfather's home in Al Nussayrat. Angrily, she said: "Yes, we moved out from our home to my grandfather's home, but the pure truth of war is that there is no safe place and that everybody is a target, guilty or not."

She continued: "On our way to Al Nussayrat, on Salah El Dein street, our car was targeted on purpose, and I assure it was on purpose, because no one else was on the road. The hit was right behind the car. Everything I remember when I heard the explosion that I asked God to forgive us, but we survived."

Ameena lost many of her relatives in the war, but what affected her the most was اغتيال قائد عسكري in Al Jihad, names Abu El Majd Al Dahdouh in an apartment building. She said: "God bless his soul, he knew he was going to die one day because he was a militant, but what affected me the most was the people who were killed in the same attack in Burj El Salam. What did they do to be killed for just being in the same place?"

In the attack that killed Abu El Majd, many civilians who live in the same building were killed, too. Most importantly, the seven members from Al Keelany family, who were all forced to

die; the parents and their five children, and this is clear violation of the principles of proportionality and discrimination applied at time of wars under international humanitarian law."

She continued: "The occupation drained my, and everyone else's right in life. It took away the safety and living in dignity, and destroyed everything we love. Gaza became a graveyard for us and our dreams because of all the crimes and destruction left by the occupation."

She added: "The Israeli crimes did not stop at targeting the civilians in their homes; one of Aahed Al Dahdouh is a civil defense worker. He was killed during his service. He was directly targeted at by the occupation artillery with his friend when they were trying to extinguish the fire that was caused by the bombs hitting Al Shejaye market."

She wondered: "Have you noticed that everyone I talked about was a civilian? And that most of those who died in the war have nothing to do with it? Why do you think I haven't gotten married nor had babies? I know that they will never be safe from the occupation, and that there is a great chance they will come back to me as dead bodies, just like a lot of children in the war. This war made my dream to get married and make a family become insignificant. How can I risk being the reason to have children and young men become victims of any upcoming war?"

Ameena expressed her sadness and sense of injustice: "The attack was just a political game from Israel; it justified it by pretending to be against Hamas, but we were the victims. Every reason Israel has used for the war was just another justification to kill as many Palestinians as possible."

She closed her eyes: "Every time I think of the number of killed and injured and destroyed homes I feel pain in my heart. Just thinking about it upsets me. I feel like all the dreams I have of a beautiful future was destroyed with the houses Israel destroyed."

Fatma and Sabreen: Two Brides; One Died and the Other Lost Her Foot

The twenty-ninth of August was the wedding day of Sabreen Al Arrar, 19, and her sister Fatma, 20, but Fatma had died on the twenty ninth of July, while Sabreen lost her foot.

That crime that destroyed the life of those two women was caused by the Israeli Occupation in the Offense. Sabreen's mother said: "When the bombing became more intense, we went to Al Falah School in Asqoula. When we knew there was a ceasefire on the first day of Eid El Fitr, we decided to go back home, but we were surprised by the bombing coming back at noon of the same day. We immediately went back to the school, but Fatma and Sabreen preferred to spend some time home." The sisters sat to read some verses of the Quran after Al Asr prayers. They would get scared every now and then. The sound of explosions was continuous. Their brother went to them to take them back to the shelter, but Fatma ended up sending him to bring their brother who waited at the neighbor's door for them to leave the house.

The brother walked a few meters away from his sisters, then he heard an explosion that shook the whole place. The neighbors told him that there was fire coming out of their house. He ran quickly and called their neighbor, Ismail Al Madhoun, who owns an ambulance to check on the sisters.

Two artillery bombs and a reconnaissance bomb were enough to destroy the life of these two beautiful women. Fatma was taken to the hospital as a dead body, as she was hit in the head. Sabreen had her feet cut off immediately. Her arm was torn and she was between life and death when she was being treated.

Sabreen became permanently disabled. She cannot move without the wheel chair that she needs but cannot find. Her mother said: "We buried Fatma on the third day of the Eid. Then we took Sabreen the next day to be treated in Egypt."

Regarding Sabreen's emotional state, her mother said: "Her sister died and her fiancé left her, all in a blink of an eye. How can she be ok? Sabreen... her happiness is gone, and life became worthless to her. I wish I had lost my home and nothing happened to my daughters."

She adds with a scratching voice: "Shereen, her 26-year-old sister, saw Fatma in her dream 10 days after she was gone. Fatma told her 'there is something missing from my body. Go to the corridor next to my bedroom, find it and bring it back to me.' Shereen woke up and went to the place Fatma told her about, and she found parts of bones and meat that came from Fatma's head when she died." The only thing their mother has is a wish; she wants to see her daughter standing on her two feet, even if they are artificial. Sabreen's wish is to become a martyr like her sister to be with her.

After Aggression: Ghadeer is Never the Same

She's so sad, crying very much, while everyone avoids reminding her of the aggression. Whenever she hears about it she remembers her dad's body, whom she never had the chance to kiss goodbye, and his blood which splattered over them when they were fleeing the house that became a pile of rubble.

With much caution, we communicated with Ghadeer Radwan who lost her father, uncles and her house in the last aggression on Gaza. Her memory still carries a lot of tragedies from the aggression, especially since she witnessed such horrific details.

She said immersed in sadness, "We were breaking our fast when my father answered the phone. "Hello, who's this?" and then he became speechless. The minute he put the phone down he cried, "Let's go we have to get out of here! The house is going to be bombed! I will warn your uncles and catch up with you later. The occupation asked us to evacuate the house before bombing it, and they're giving us no more than five minutes to leave!"

The Rudwan family fled the house one after another. It took her father and uncles longer time to leave. Before they could make it to the house door, an Israeli missile landed and destroyed it. The scattered rubble wounded the family members who already fled the house.

The fanciful Ghadeer who was a great writer is no longer able to use the words to express her pain and sadness. She speaks with a cracked voice, "My father and uncles are killed and a big number of my family members wounded with shrapnel. Our house is destroyed. Our clothes and books are burned. We became homeless orphans with no father to take care of us and no shelter to protect us from the humiliation of need and begging."

The little girl cried heavily before finally taking her breath and continued, "We sought refuge in a school that was crowded with many refugees from Khan Younis. There we spent the night with minimal human life necessities, with refugees jammed in school rooms. I was in a room with at least eighty people with no partitions between men and women and no blankets to cover our bodies"

"I kept crying until I fell asleep. I didn't know how long I slept, but I didn't wake up until I heard my mother's voice asking me to drink some water and eat some food. this situation continued until I heard a huge explosion inside the school."

Ghadeer said with a sadness on her face and an intense voice, "I went out horrified after the explosion shocked to see dead bodies everywhere and the smell of blood and fire filled my nose. I remembered my father, whose all but two legs had vanished, and I started screaming and crying."

The family didn't leave the refugee center, and received some help days after the Israeli occupation targeted the school. But Ghadeer's situation didn't change. She is still scared of loud sounds, chokes from the smell of fire, and she expresses how she misses her father almost everyday.

She closed her eyes and sighed heavily, "My father is still alive in my memory, and I won't forget my house either. I won't forgive who caused that; the Israeli soldier who launched the missile towards my father and deprived us from him. He went back home safely to his wife and kids, and he doesn't even care about the crime he committed. I won't forgive him nor will I absolve the occupation for what they did.

Hadyya... The Israeli Machine Destroyed her House and Town

In Khuza'a Town, a stage for the most brutal events in the Offensive, Hadyya was still mourning her house that turned into a rubble pile after she was forced to leave it because of the missiles that did not differentiate between one house and another in town.

A state of sorrow took over the appearance of Hadyya's thirteen family members when they stood by the house that used to be filled with happiness before the war, especially when the mother hosted a party for her son's wedding in a house filled with love, joy, and sadness.

Hadyya said: "I grabbed some of my son's clothes, the son who got married two months ago. I shook the dust of the missiles from them." That is what Hadyya did when she regained consciousness and woke up to the tough scene of her house after being destroyed by the IDF. She continued as if she does not want to remember what happened in the death night, as she called it, saying: "Just like everyone in Khuza'a Town, death was surrounding us and the artillery bombs were falling like the rain, one after another, so in one minute 7 or 8 bombs would fall." She didn't comprehend what was going on around her. She only wanted to go out with the family in peace after one of the bombs hit the highest floor of their three story house, but it did not explode.

Hadyya continued: "Once the bomb fell, we left the house like crazy, not caring about what would happen to us or where we would go. We just wanted to get out of town, to leave the scene of falling bombs and the missiles that did not differentiate between a human and a stone. It was falling like rain... we left our house on the seventeenth day of the war, around 4 pm. We walked more than an hour under the burning sun in Ramadan." The woman continued sarcastically: "We survived so our tragedy would repeat and so we would be alive when the next attack happens, and when Israel comes back to kill us again, and to destroy our houses, if we could rebuild them."

On the day they went home, it was one of the humanitarian ceasefire days, the detailed view of the massacre of Khuza'a on the east of Khan Yunis began to appear; most of the houses in town had turned into a pile of ash, except for the bodies of the martyrs on the ground, who were photographed and had some of their photos shared by journalists.

Hadyya went with some of her family members to check on the house and see what happened to it. She fainted. Her sons woke her up and tried to keep her calm. That was in the room of one of her neighbors' homes. On the remnants of her destroyed home, she stood up and yelled: "We had a house here. Three floors collapsed like a thin cookie. Two months ago we were very happy. We had the best wedding party in town."

Hadyya's house was near the border. She suffered many times because of the Israeli force, but she had a life that she loved with its ups and downs, but now they're all homeless with no place to go.

Her house wasn't guilty of shooting bullets ,, neither its doors pointing guns

It's the same feeling again and again in her life, and in every time her body trembles like the first, her feet are sweaty walking and heavily, and her heart beats piercing the sound barrier, and the few meters beneath her feet become miles.

Um Mustafa Al-Kafarnah, the elderly woman on her 80s, she isn't young any more to run escaping from the shower of bullets, and her weak feet aren't holding her through the broken roads looking for a rescue, her life is precious, and as long as she isn't guilty to be killed, she'll deserves to survive.

In the last aggression on Gaza, Al-Kafarnah fled her house, which was hammered with bullets and heavy Israeli missiles, looking for any shelter in UN school that she considers safer than her own house which became a target for the bullets and missiles of the occupying forces.

" I soak refugee from my home village Lubia when I was 14, and my family and we were forced to leave again to Gaza after the 1967 catastrophe to Gaza, at that time I was healthy and fit to run long distances as the aggressive Israeli killing machines starts to take lives" said Al-Kafarna with a sad wrinkly face.

In 2009 aggression, AL-Kafarnah had experienced the same feelings that she had during her immigration with her family on a long, dark, sandy road toward safer place in 1948, her heart beats screamed, her head was still spinning, her feet became heavy and she is no more able to run, her sons carried her to a refugee center away from her house that was within reach of the Israeli missiles.

She proceeds with her hands tight on her outfit " My dreadful feeling hasn't changed, it was in the four tragedies I've experienced since immigration, and the consequent aggressions of 2009, 2011 and 2014, my extremities shake and my tongue got dry, and I lose the sense of place and time, and in each time I escape looking for safety in a place far away from my targeted house"

In the last aggression on the strip, her children and grandchildren have been gathered in the ground floor of her multiple-stories house after

the first bombing which shook them and awoken their children at night, and with the night ending over the area, the sounds of bombings became louder, and the Israeli missiles could reach the safe houses.

The Kafarnah added as her eyes wandering around " The rockets' sounds got closer, the Israeli missiles are falling near the house, and we could hear its sounds hitting the house walls, the kids were wrapped by their parents, and my head was covered with my white scarf praying for god"

The occupation targeted the house next to Al-Kafarnah's at 11 p.m approximately, after then the attacking continued heavily, according to Um Mustafa who didn't stress her memory to remember that the rockets and missiles hit one of the rooms in the upper level of her house and made it a pile of rubble, and another one injured her youngest son.

" I saw my son bleeding, and I couldn't help him so I screamed waiting for someone who can, hoping for ambulance could reach us, the near bombings made me afraid of the house possible collapse on our heads at any moment", Al-Kafarnah continued with a lot of pain "We hid in the kitchen for it was the furthest place from the missiles, yet it really wasn't"

The family fled at night, holding each other, and Um Mustafa was walked by her sons who were trying to avoid shrapnel of the missiles trying to reach to Kamal Idwan Hospital, and in the next morning they all left together to UN Al-Rimal school.

After they'd left the house, and going to refugee centre, the Israeli military tanks demolished several houses at East Gaza, including their house which they became homeless after it, about that Al-Kafarnah said " The feelings of homelessness I've lived during Al-Nakbah I'm tasting it now again after my house demolished, the house stones didn't throw rockets at the occupation, and its doors don't know how to hold a gun, nevertheless they turned it into moraine and made us homeless without it"

I Was Frightened in the School

In the last attack on Gaza, the school turned into public shelters for thousands of refugees. All of those shelters were filled with disorder and troubles, and only those refugees, including Rana Hamad and her family, could feel it.

Rana, who ran away from the Israeli missiles that reached every place for fifty one years: "I spent two weeks in the school and I couldn't handle more. I was about to lose my mind. Everything was very irritating."

She said she spent her days in a room that she had to share with about eighty people. They had to spend most of the days standing because of how crowded the place was, according to her. She continued: "I was afraid to use the bathroom; it takes about an hour of waiting in line for it, and I would almost black out because of how it smells."

The shelters, which made it easy for anyone to catch a disease, caused the mother to consider leaving as soon as possible, according to her, as she continued saying: "Everything was crowded. There was no safety, especially for a mother with four daughters. I was extremely worried about them. I would sleep at midnight, then I would wake up and my husband would sleep. We changed shifts daily."

"We left the school and went to my sister's home downtown Gaza City. We shared her house with thirty people, but it was still better than the school." Hamad said, "The land invasion was not the only reason for us to leave the house, but having our house bombed by the reconnaissance aircrafts with two missiles and causing injuries to some of us made us leave until the war was over."

Hamad continued: "After the semi destruction that happened to my house, we went to live at my husband's mother for one week. My husband had a stroke caused by the sadness for what happened to the house and the pain and fear that he had. After that week, the land invasion began in town, so we left my mother-in-law's house and walked for more than two hours with the missiles above our heads while my husband and I were both injured until we made to Shadya Abu Ghazala School in Jabalia."

The mother felt safe for a while, then she knew that Israel is targeting the schools and killing the safe people in them, so she became more afraid and left the school, and now she's among what's left of her house waiting for it to be renovated.

In the Shelter, My Daughter Saw the Light

While seeking refuge, her daughter came to life in a room with no walls, nor a warm bed that could relieve her from the coldness of this life. Fayza Wahid Al-Kafarna, 30, escaped death twice with her unborn child and three daughters and couldn't find a shelter after having surgery to give birth except for a relief center. She spent her first days lying in a room with only a square shaped cloth to hide her from the people's eyes.

Fayza said, "I was in my last month of pregnancy when the aggression began on Gaza. I prayed to God that it ends before I go into labor, but that didn't happen for I gave birth of my fourth daughter during that time." She proceeded, "Beit Hanoun was the first area damaged in the aggression. The people fled their houses earlier but my husband didn't like the idea of fleeing until the missiles' shrapnel breached the house. Only then he had to change his mind and leave to my family's house."

Her family's situation wasn't better than hers due to the two near houses that were warned to be bombed. She tried to leave the house looking for a safer place that would allow her to embrace her daughters in peace if they panicked or were frightened of the sounds of bombings.

Al-Kafarna added, "Fear and exhaustion didn't stall my labor, and when it came I called my husband who was far away from the house and was trying hard to reach me. My trip started with the long road to Al-Shifa'a hospital. The streets were empty and the sound of bombing was heard constantly. The car was slow enough to worsen my condition."

With pain, she continued, "Mothers' wishes during the aggression are too simple. All we want is to see our children unscathed, and I wished nothing but safety for my daughters and the coming baby. I was afraid that my new baby would be born with defects or something bad would happen to her prevent me from seeing her before she takes her first breath.

Al-Kafarna reached Al-Shifa'a hospital at which the doctors were busy with the casualties, martyrs, and the wounded. The doctors took a long time to get to her, and in a few minutes they decided to do her a cesarean delivery in order to save her life and her children. She said, "They decided to give me surgery and the anesthesia wasn't enough, so I had a hard time during surgery. I was in a state of semi consciousness. After two days from the surgery, I went to a UN school that was the first place to shelter me, my new baby, my children, and my husband. It's a place with no privacy nor comfortability, and I didn't feel warmth in it, as I was holding in my arms a baby who I should have at least provided with warmth."

Lamia, A Mother Who Lost her Four Children While Harvesting Corn

On the morning of August 21st, the strong sound of an explosion came from the street of Al-Nafq, west of the city of Gaza, evidence of the heinous crimes of Operation Protective Edge and contributed to the martyrdom of seven members of the AlReefi family.

Four of Lamia AlReefi's children were martyred: Ziyad, 9, Maryam, 7, Abdullah 5, and Ahmed, four. In addition to them were Lamia's brother-in-laws, Muhammad, 32, Nasr, 28, and Nasr's son, Omar, eight. As for her husband, he was badly wounded with fractures to his hand and leg.

The beginning of our story and its details are as the mother, Lamia, 32, narrates. When her husband decided to take his four children and two of his brothers on an outing to the family's agricultural estate, a distance of meters away from their home. On the way, while concerned with the reaping of corn, an Israeli rocket surprised them before their arrival. Lamia cries, "My little boy Ziyad didn't die immediately with his siblings, even though his injuries were severe, it tore through his stomach and ripped his kidney and caused him to severely bleed out. He endured for a full week while we waited for a transfer outside of Gaza for his treatment and after two weeks of his battle with equipment, wires, and bandages that covered his entire body, he followed his siblings."

And the mother of these martyrs painfully continued, "My heart was being torn constantly for my son, Ziyad. For with each painful breath he took, I was also pained. The loss of my three children all at once was a shocking blow but the greater shock was the loss of Ziyad. I had hoped he would live and continue his life by my side for I always thought of him as the man of the house and would depend on him a lot. I never left his bedside while he was in the ICU. the intensive care unit.

Lamia's husband, Tariq, was in the ICU, the intensive care unit, during his children and brother's funeral and did not have the chance to look at them one last time nor did he get to bid them farewell. However, when his son, Ziyad, passed away, family member carried Ziyad's body on their shoulders to Tariq's hospital room for him to get a last look at his son. In that moment, he wept a great deal at the sight of his son. It was a tragic and sorrowing experience causing

everyone in the room to weep as they listened to the father's words to his son.

Lamia says as she hugs her one and only daughter who was spared from the bombing, Deema only one and a half years old, "My husband is now in stable condition however he is in need of round the clock care. He cannot move without my help and I am the one who looks after him. I try to constantly improve his mental state for he was unbelievably attached to his children, especially Ahmed. He blames himself and constantly repeats, 'I am the one who lead them to their deaths, we were reaping the harvest, I couldn't do anything for them. They died in front of my eyes.'"

The state of the parents is extremely awful. Lamia tries to hide the feelings of pain she keeps in her heart in support of her husband get through his ordeal. She smiles in his face and she bears through the disaster they have had to face. Lamia says, "I cry a lot when I am away from him and I am overcome with pain. However, in his face, I smile and I tell him to be patient and I tell him that they are now the birds of heaven – that they are intercessors on our behalf and that God, The Giving, loves us and that is why he has tested us. And that we will have more children and return to our former lives.

Lamia's, who is an accountant in the department of health, tormenting ordeal did not prevent her from meeting the responsibilities of her job even while attending to her injured husband and son, Ziyad, before his death, in the hospital where the corpses of two of her children exited. She considers her persistence in the work field the most powerful message sent to the occupier. She says, "Life will go on despite all the anguish we are subjected to and my children's place is in my heart and god-willing, we will have more children."

Little Deema's eyes have not yet ceased to search in pursuit of her siblings and she remembers, calls out, their names constantly as though asking for them as she was the pampered one, being the youngest. A familiar voice constantly calls to her, "Sleep now my little one, and be thankful for each blessed day of your life for no one knows what the coming days have in store for you and an enemy stands before you who delights in the slaughter of children without hesitation."

Lost my Furniture in the Middle of my Destroyed Home

■ I tried to protect the furniture of the house as much as I could. I would not have cried over my small house from collapsing, but I was worried by the idea of losing all those years and effort I made to make the cost of this furniture for nothing.” said Rabeeha Hjeilah, who had lost her furniture under the destroyed half of her house.

Looking at her children who hide together by a tent set over the ruins of their home, the woman said: “The war machine did not exclude our humble home, and it killed our dreams with it and made us run away from death with horror.”

Hjeilah continued: “Three days before the end of war on Gaza, half of my house was gone; my small house is between two houses that were targeted by the IDF. The funny part is that I thought one of the houses was targeted, so I gathered all my furniture and hid it in the northern room, but the house on the south was not hit, unlike the house on the west that took all my furniture that I tried so hard to save with it.”

A bedroom, the kitchen and a small yard was everything left for her after the war. She put a tent in the yard and put her things in it and made it her new home.

The woman added: “We heard someone scream in the house next door. We went out and asked what happened and they told us that Al Ghouli’s house is going to be bombed. At that moment I yelled at everyone to go out. I had a lot of guests and some family members. Everybody went out with their bare feet. We ran in the road unconsciously, and behind us was the loud explosion that shook the area.”

Hjeilah continued in pain: “A while later I went back to my house and found nothing of the things I worked so hard to get. And the worst part is that my house became uninhabitable and I could not afford renting another house.”

“A few days after my house was hit, my guests and I went back to the remnants of the house to stay there, and that was better than being burden on others since we were not one person or two; we were a group of families,” continued the woman, “cold nights await us. I don’t know how I’m going to cope with that. My little kids are not used to sleeping in the open air, and I still cannot gather enough money to buy winter clothes. And here I am, waiting for God to help me so I save myself from begging and protect my children from death.”

One phone call from the IDF to Hjeilah’s neighbors was enough to put the children in a horrifying situation that the mother could not control, and two missiles were enough to waste the “effort of life” and kept the children in an unenviable psychological state that was very hard to get rid of.

The mother said: “I’m worried that my children would live with a lot of pain in their life because of what they remember about the war. I do not know if trying to forget it and ignored talking about it will make them forget too, or if it will make things worse for them and make them more fearful.”

Mahdya Left Holding Her Disabled Sister

Unforgettable moments are in the mind of Mahdya Al Ghrably from Al Shejayia. Those moments represent the toughest experience for this woman during the Offensive. Mahdya saw death with her own eyes before and after fleeing her home, and despite all that, her only concern was to protect her disabled sister from the aggression of this attack. Mahdya said: “we could not accept that the Israeli attack would be so aggressive. We expected red lines somehow respecting the civilians, but the civilian homes, the elders and the disabled were hit in disgusting ways.” One day before the ground invasion, Al Mansoura’s residents, including Mahdya, had been warned to evacuate their homes, but Mahdya’s father refused to leave the house, and started to calm his family, in the hopes for the missiles to not reach them. Mahdya said: “We did not get out of the house, and as I watched the situation through my bedroom window, a missile went down on a house near ours, and one of the rocks from the house hit me. That is when I felt that we were not safe, and that we had to leave the house immediately.”

A little before they decided to leave, Mahdya’s family received a call from the Israeli intelligence, asking them to leave the house. Mahdya said: “During that night, we did not sleep, continuous bombing, we want to get out, but we didn’t know how.”

We contacted the Red Cross. They told us they will not be able to go to the area because of how dangerous it was. We gathered in the fifth floor. The tanks began the invasion. She continues: “We felt trapped. We could not leave the house. Once the dawn started, we heard sounds on the street. People were walking in large groups under all the bombing. All I cared about was my disabled sisters and how I would get them out.”

Mahdya’s family left the house where the missiles flew over their heads. People would pass by the dead bodies of children, men and women. At that moment, Mahdya was holding her seven-year-old sister. Mahdya’s brother held the other sister, fourteen years old. During the walk, Mahdya’s family found one of the Red Cross ambulance cars, which took them to their aunt’s house in Al Zaytoon, soon enough the place seemed to be unsafe, so they immediately left of the house of their father’s friend in Tal El Hawa. They stayed there until the end of war.

Mahdya said: “After the war we went to see how damaged our house is. It was partially damaged because of the Israeli raids. Now we have to live in the house even though it’s very cold because of the broken walls and windows and doors.”

Mai... A Bride at War for Exceptional Circumstances

Three years of engagement, and a wedding planned faster than wind to happen under fire. A unique situation that 20-year-old Mai Al Jerjawy has lived, because even though her husband was poor and his life has confusing details, the choice of getting married during the war was never one of those details.

The groom's mother, Um Fady Al Jerjawy, sighed and said: "Our story is weird, started with poverty and ended with a war; my son was in jail because we were sued by people who wanted a lot of money from us but our poverty kept us from paying them back, that's why my sons and their father go to jail a lot, because all of the complaints."

The groom's story began a little before Ramadan. The family planned to marry the son in Eid El Fitr because he would go out of jail to spend the holiday with the family. The bride's family accepted, but the war came and took the happiness that Mai and Ramy had been waiting for for three years.

She added: "He got engaged before the debt problems and jail and complaints. The debt is his father's, not his. Since then, the day would pass by and my son would spend most of his life in jail, and his fiancée and her family were very patient all that time. That's why we decided to make the wedding in the eid."

Fady's mother did not want the engagement period to be longer. She knew that delaying the wedding until after the war means another year of waiting. She did not "dare make a wedding when everyone is sad", so we married them quietly during the war. Her family would not accept making the engagement last longer. God knows how unhappy I was. The blood of martyrs is precious, but our life is very difficult."

Regarding planning the wedding, Um Fady used the five-day ceasefire during the war, and she did everything. She said: "Our neighbor has a wedding dress store next to our home. I went to her and asked her to open the store for us to rent a wedding dress, because even at war, the bride still deserves to live that moment."

She laughed: "I looked so hard for a beauty salon and found someone who could put makeup on our bride at home. I went to Mai's family and told them that I got a dress and a makeup artist, and they made a small party in their house before they sent her to our house."

Mai and her husband live in a room in the family house. She was shy/ she sat quietly and smiled whenever someone talked about the details of preparing for the wedding. She said: "I wished I had a better wedding in better circumstances, but my husband's situation, his staying in jail, and our engagement that lasted for so long made me accept the marriage regardless the risk."

She continued: "I waited for so long to pick my wedding dress. I planned to go to a few stores, but having my mother-in-law choose it for me was not expected, but it is what actually happened."

Mai's wedding was not exceptional in its arrangements; even managing the small details was difficult. She said: "The war happened to stop the bombing and close the tunnels, but that is not an excuse for the occupation for take away my happiness. I had two options: whether to get married or to wait another year, and my family would not want to wait any longer. Even the society wouldn't."

With extreme sadness: "The bride comes out of her father's house in a small party, surrounded by a lot of people, especially the family. I went out with my mother only. She gave me to my husband's family and went back home quickly. The next morning was not similar to any bride's morning; my family came fast to check on me. We did not sing or dance. They did not bring deserts or gifts like parents do for their daughters."

Her eyes دمعت: "I left my father's home in a situation that no girl wishes for. I did not feel the joy of the bride. I do not even have one photo of that day. How I wished I had a photo album of me as a bride, but my wish was hard to come true in war."

Mai moved from her parents' house to her husband's house with little preparation and a lot of fear and horror. She expressed that "Israel took away my right of living safely and having a happy wedding, and my right of living a marriage with enough comfort and privacy."

Mai talked about her prayers for security: "random shelling and without warning killed a lot of families who were guilty of nothing. Most of those who died were civilians, and I'm civilian like them, so why would I be an exception? What we experienced in war proved that there is no difference between a civilian and a militant."



Misery Among Rubble

She's a woman overwhelmed with hardships for after she lost her house and became homeless after the last aggression on the strip she's not as she was before. She can't laugh and even her life became comfortless.

Um Ibrahim Sa'ad, 49, looked sadly at her house at Al-Mansoura Street, Shejaeya and said, "On the 24th day of the destructive war, the occupying forces struck Al-Shejaeya and the flames spread all over Al-Sha'af area, and the level of destruction and demolishment increased, and nothing was safe anymore."

And she adds, "I can't describe what happened in the massacre with a few words the way I witnessed it with my eyes. I won't be able to describe it in words or picture the way my bare eyes saw eyes saw it."

And with a choked voice and rough sigh, Um Ibrahim said, "All the neighborhood residents, elderly, young, men, women, and children were running over the destruction and rubble and what was left of the buildings. Some stumbled over the rubble and others fell on the bodies of martyrs. Others were wounded by shrapnel and continued running despite the bleeding of their bodies, a few others were holding on to their sister or brother, and some were carried by their mothers"

Um Ibrahim's steps were slow as she was an exhausted older lady. "After the ceasefire ended, we went back to our houses at Al-Mansoura neighborhood in Shejaea, and I went to check on my house. I couldn't find it. I tried to focus again in order to recognize it, but all my attempts failed since the Israeli occupying forces had destroyed all the houses in the area and brought them to the ground." She added, "As a result of the massive destruction, it was so hard for us to locate our houses. The other residents' tragedies were not less harrowing than ours. Every one there couldn't find where the house they had lived in for years."

In heartbreak and pain, Um Mohammad said, "All the buildings were bombed, and what were left of it was burned and damaged from the Israeli airplanes. We've survived the last aggression, yet we didn't witness a more horrific and barbaric attack than this one. I feel the pain when I remember everything was around me before, mosques, trees and buildings, and how they'd turned to a mass of destruction, how everything became ash, and we all became homeless. What crime did we commit for this? There is nothing I can do now except seek justice from God."

Noura Harara- A severe injury disables her movements

In a small two bedroom house with a kitchen and bathroom, a ceiling made of asbestos and humble furniture, lived Noura Harara, 30, with her husband and four children. In a few seconds Operation Protective Edge aircrafts transformed this family's life into tragedy.

The house was destroyed before it was even paid off by her husband, an employee for the Palestinian Authority. The details of this Israeli crime goes back to the dawn of July 20th, the day Israeli occupying forces invaded the Mentar region, East of Gaza the day a massacre was committed against the innocent civilians including children, women, elderly, and youth of the crowded neighborhood of Shujaiya. On Thursday, Noura and her family were awoken by an Israeli missile targeting their small home. Before Noura could understand what was happening around her, the airstrikes continued hitting the room the family was sitting in. Rocks and asbestos tumbled over them.

Noura tells us about that cruel moment saying, "My son Ibrahim, 14, was wounded in his head and feet. And I was injured in multiple areas. The situation was heartbreaking. The dust and darkness of the rubble prevented us from knowing each other's fate. My son screamed, "Please don't die mom! Please stay with us!"

Besides the penetration of missile shrapnel in her chest, Noura was wounded in her spleen and her spinal cord causing internal bleeding. Doctors have not been able to find a solution to the shrapnel that still exists in her body due to a lack of medical supplies that are needed for her operation.

Now Noura continues her treatment after having multiple surgeries and her main concern is to be able to take care of her kids. But the lack of ability to move hurts her. She says to us, " My house is gone. My body is paralyzed and tired. I want treatment to live with my husband and children even if it means living in a tent that will bring us together." Noura's mother, nicknamed Am Mazen Eleywa, says, " They removed her spleen and now we don't know if she will ever walk again or not. Am Mazen tried to talk more about Noura's situation and says, "I'm afraid she'll never be able to walk. No one will ever feel my pain and defeat. I seek God's justice and retribution from Israel."

Noura's story doesn't end here. She is now imprisoned in Gaza waiting for the Rafah border to open so that she may travel to Turkey to remove the shrapnel from her body and conduct a surgery in her back so she may return to try to attain a normal life again.

Our White Flags Did Not Stop Their Missiles

She held some blankets, shifting them from hand to hand, hoping to feel their softness. She pushed the blankets towards her son. She asked, "Are they that rough?". He shook his head with disagreement, but she was not convinced. These blankets are not as soft as the ones she left in her house before the attack.

Fatma Helles, who had run away with her children to a bomb shelter, did not adapt the new situation that the Israeli aggression forced her to try, as she was one of the citizens of Al Shejaiya who wandered around, asking for protection from the occupation shells that does not differentiate between the old or young.

Helles said, pulling one of her blankets over her legs: "we were in an unenviable situation. We escaped death to become needy. We did not have food or drinks. We tried our best to keep our starving children patient until some philanthropists came in with the food, water and blankets. They gave them to the emigrants, and we had our share".

Since the last attack on Gaza, Hellen family has been living a state of horror and fear, especially that the Israeli shells did not differentiate between a citizen and a militant and bombed a lot of houses with the residents inside. But the night of the twentieth of July was the most frightening, according to Fatma.

She said: "The Israeli tanks became very close to our neighborhood. The missiles began to fall around us like rain to the point where we could not tell where they were coming from. The fragments scattered on the floor like lentils; so loud but so small in size".

Fatma continued speaking in a fast pace: "we gathered on the ground floor. The only thing we heard after every explosion was the sound of screaming and crying. None of us had enough strength to calm the children and women down. All of us expected to die. We were thinking about our children's life after our death. We stayed close from each other so the missile would kill us together. We were too desperate to wish for a chance to survive".

Helles sighed and tried to gather her strength to remember how they went out of the house under the fire with the white flags: "we heard the explosion of a bomb in our house", she said, "we decided to leave, desperate to survive inside. We raised the white flags, held our children and ran west, all while trying to avoid being hit by the missiles and it's shrapnel.

The family made it to a house in an OK distance from their home. After resting there for a few hours, they heard the explosions again, and every time it calms down, they would hear the sound of people's screams come closer, until they decided to follow the other people escaping because they did not want to come face to face with death again, according to Helles.

She sighed, took a deep breath and continued speaking rapidly as before: "we would step on the dead bodies. We would hear the moan of the injured but we could not see them. Everybody just wanted to survive. Every time I remember that night, my heart aches and my breath shortens".

The emigrants, along with the Helles family, lived in AL Shifa hospital without any aid. The situation was worse when they tried to move to the schools that opened its doors for the emigrants, so they went back to the hospital's square until the philanthropists gave them blankets, food, drinks and tents.

Rida Al-Zahar One Painful Hour Beneath her House's Rubble

Mrs. Rida Al- Zahar tried to overcome her surmise that the danger of the "Protective Edge" aggression is far away from her, but this wishful thinking proved to be a lit on the 8th of August, when the occupying forces launched an F-16 rocket at her house. After that strike, Rida's body was buried beneath her house rubble for more than one hour until the Civil Defense crewmembers came and rescued her after she was announced as a martyr.

Rida was steadfast at her house with danger surrounding her in every moment, her chance came on the 8th of August ceasefire. Rida was preparing to leave the house along with her sons and her sister's family who live next to their house. As they were leaving, the catastrophe occurred. Rida says, "At 3 p.m in the afternoon, one of my house rooms was suddenly bombed while my daughters and I were sitting in the living room. We panicked and my son Hamza went out of his room screaming "Mama! Mama! They struck us while I was sleeping in the room!" Rida didn't know that this warning missile will be followed with a fiercer rocket. She stayed in the house calling for an ambulance while she was gathering her children around her when an F-16 rocket struck the house committing the big crime. Rida continues, "I was talking to Hamza, asking him to go with his brothers to the stairway when an F-16 rocket, after only 60 seconds from the first warning missile, fell. Then I felt the floor swallowing me very strongly and everything fell down until I was buried completely, and the rubble covered me."

Rida was covered in rubble in a situation that's hard to describe, while her daughter Iman had a slight injury. She continued to describe what happened. "It was God' mercy that there was a

pretty small space like a size of a hand fist in front of my nose and mouth while the rest of my body was covered in sand, stones, and dust. Until all my extremities went numb while laying on my right side. I was hardly breathing and I couldn't stop praying and asking for forgiveness and saying "Ya-Allah".

She proceeds, "The pressure on my body was unendurable, the ground so hot due to the explosive rocket wave. I didn't totally lose my consciousness and I kept praying and saying "Allah!" before I heard some voices. I had a hope of survival from all this, those voices indeed were Civil Defense crews trying to look for me."

Rida adds, "While the bulldozer was disposing of debris, the ground moved around me a little. My body went up a bit so I had managed to open my left eye partially to see a light that doesn't come like a kneel, and I kept saying "Ya Allah".

After a bulldozer moved another pile of rubble off her, one of the Civil Defense crewmembers had managed to glimpse Rida. He shouted and warned her not to hurt herself. The rest of the crew began to remove what was left on her face, and then started to rejoice and Kaber after they had announced that she was still alive.

Rida talks about the horrifying hour saying, "I spent over an hour beneath moraine. The water storage tanks on the roof exploded and the water leaked all over the area I was buried under. My body got wet and that relieved me from the bombing high temperature."

Rida came out of the rubble without any fracture, severe injuries, or misshapes, only with a few bruises and wounds in her face and legs. She survived to live a life of a homeless person.

Little Rimas Suffers from Big Burns

Standing next to her daughter's bed, the mother of Rimas Yousef Al-Najjar, 3, was doing the best she could to alleviate her daughter's pain. The child was burned severely when their neighbor's house was bombed during Operation Protective Edge, and even though gauze covers half of Rimas's body, the little air that came from her mother's fanning using a piece of carton, slightly relieved her pain.

On the day of the tragedy, Rimas's mother wanted to collect the hanging laundry on the roof with Rimas's company. While Rimas was playing around, the place shuddered from a massive explosion that dropped Rimas and her mother to the ground. The mother says, "The smoke filled the air so I couldn't see where my daughter was, but then I crawled on the ground trying to look for her while her piercing screams panicked me. I felt something bad happened to her, but I kept saying to myself I hope she is screaming out of fear from the explosion."

"It was our neighbor's house that had been targeted by F-16 missiles that laid the three-floor building to the ground. Shrapnel and gravel of the targeted house dispersed all over the nearby buildings at the Al-Najjar region southeast of Khan Younis. One piece of shrapnel had pierced the hot water storage tank that belonged to Rimas's family, causing the tank to break into pieces and the boiling water to pour onto the body of little Rimas.

Rimas's mother continues, "As my child was screaming I was calling her so I could console her, and when I finally reached her and the dust started to fade, I fell into shock when her body began to disintegrate between my hands while she was screaming in pain and shouting "Mama!"

The mother carried her child and rushed to the house door, where the neighbors had gathered to rescue the wounded. One paramedic who reached the location tried to give Rimas first aid, Rimas's injury was dreadful, her body was covered in blood and ulcers due to the boiling water that burned her young body.

Rimas's mother adds, "We took her to Naser Medical Center, and she received the treatment. However, because of her critical medical condition she was transferred to Al-Shifa'a Hospital to follow up and to prevent any relapse. I stayed with her for more than three weeks at the hospital, but she is still recovering from the burns"

What hurts Rimas's mother the most is hearing the wail of her little child constantly. She says, " I wish I could relieve her pains, I feel sorry for her knowing that the scars left on her body will stay permanently."

Samar... A Martyr Stuck with her Son and Embryo

Samar Al Hallaq, 29, took a big responsibility when she insisted on spreading the Palestinian heritage all over the world. This woman pushed herself working at her project (Naseej) as an organizer to help protect this heritage from getting lost, but the Israeli occupation refused to let this mother (with two kids) live. Samar was killed in the Offensive with sever of her family members, for this crime to be added to the history of Israeli crimes to the Palestinian families.

When the war began, Samar was in her ninth month of pregnancy. She was preparing to welcome her third son. She prepared his room and the birth bag. She decorated the baby's room with the color blue and with toys, but that war forced her and her family to leave the house immediately. Indeed, she moved out with her husband's family to one of the apartments in Al Daour apartment building in Al Wehda Street. Samar spent very rough days, between her pregnancy and the aggression of the Israeli occupation that targeted everything around her.

One of those tiring days, the IDF hit the apartment where Al Hallaq's family gathered. Samar's husband went out to buy bread, and before he gets far from the building, he ran back to check on his family after he heard a horrifying explosion. Hasan, the husband, said: "Before I opened the apartment door the occupation continued bombing the house and I hit my leg. I did not care about the injury as much as I insisted on going inside the house and see what happened to my family. Then I wished to die a thousand times than see my family gets killed by the missiles."

The bomb hit the house directly; it went in the house from the kitchen while the women prepared the eftar in Ramadan. Eight people died immediately including Samar, her sons Sajy (4 years old) and Kenan (5 years old). Shockingly, Sajy's body was stuck to his mother's body and the doctors could not separate them so they buried them together, along with the baby inside her. Hany Mohammed Al Hallaq and Suad Mohammed Al Hallaq also died. 15 people were injured.

Hasan spent some time in the hospital for therapy in Al Shifa hospital in Gaza. His mother said that this occupation did not let Samar enjoy her new home in Al Karama which she bought and prepared completely, and made a special room for her newborn.





The Occupation Destroyed Sanaa's Happiness, Home and Income

In the Offensive in 2008, the Israeli occupation destroyed the "club" of Mrs. Sanaa's son Obeid, and as she was still in the pain of loss, the Offensive began. She was afraid that something bad would happen to her four sons and her grandchildren.

In that war, Sanaa (50 years old) lived a very rough life with her family. She prepared everything to leave the country but the continuous bombing stopped her. Soon her house was bombed with everyone still inside it with a reconnaissance aircraft bomb then with an F16 bomb.

Sanaa said: "The house collapsed over my son, Shadi, and my husband, but thanks to God their injuries were minor, so we went to my parents' house, and while we were there, I heard that the bombing continued on our house and destroyed it completely."

Sanaa had spent 20 years in that house, or since she came from Jordan to settle in Gaza in 1994. She did a lot to prepare that three story house. Sanaa continues the story of pain: "We had a gas station and an auto shop and the house. They were all gone. Nothing was left. Israel took away the memories, the safety and the income source we had for living."

The family became homeless after living safely in its own home. Overnight ten people had no shelter except for one store that belonged to the uncle. The store turned from a place to raise the chicken to a place for that family to live, and part of the store left for the sheep and goats, which caused a bad smell all over the place for the people living there, as well as the diseases that would transmit to the children or even the adults. Shadi and his 9-month pregnant wife had a room filled with sand everywhere. The ground was uneven and had some cloth and blankets for sleeping.

Sobhia, Sanaa's oldest sister, who was 23 years old, was preparing for her wedding; just like every bride in the world, she would dream about the day she would wear her white dress and veil. She spent the nights planning and imagining how she will look like in one of the most beautiful nights in life, and her mother would dream about giving her daughter to her future son-in-law.

Sanaa says with tears on her face: "Everything I prepared for my daughter is gone under the ruins. We got her what we lost after the war, and she got married. I wanted to make her a big party, but the war took our dreams away. She left her uncle's house. The happiness in our hearts is gone."

She Lost Her Last Dream Under the Ruins of “the Italian”

In an elegant place, and with a unique style, an international company built the tallest apartment building in Gaza Strip. Living in that building was the dream of everyone who wanted to own a beautiful home. Many people were lucky to live there, but their luck turned upside down when that place became the shame of the attack in 2014.

Mrs. Nesma Al Madhoun, a woman in her sixties, welcomed me with a sad face hiding behind a smile. Naeema sold her house that she had lived in for two years, and took the money she had been saving with her husband when she was in Iraq to buy two flats in the Italian mall apartment building.

The Italian Mall was famous for being high class, but now it became a workshop of destruction. That's because the Israeli occupation decided to turn it into a chicken whose meat was removed from its bones; the elevator is still in the building, but the flats around it were destroyed. They painted the ugliest pictures in the imagination of the citizens of Gaza by targeting the largest apartment buildings.

The “Italian”, as named by the local residents, had around sixty families, the average number of members of each family was about six people. With a simple equation you can tell that three hundred people became homeless after having their only home destroyed.

Among these people was this woman who had put everything she owned together to buy the two destroyed apartments in the legendary building. She said: “One night before the attack, the IDF called my husband's mobile phone and told me about the importance of completely evacuating the building in ten minutes. I started yelling how

sixty families can evacuate in ten minutes. The soldier on the phone said he'll give us half an hour.”

She added: “I was not surprised, because once I had noticed the apartment building targeting I packed all of our important papers and some of the expensive items in a bag and kept the bag near the door. When the IDF called we carried the bag and left. At that moment I took one last look at the home that I decorated with the most beautiful furniture. It felt like a knife cutting through me.”

“I went out of the house, and on my way down I would tell everyone I see that the building is about to be bombed. At the building door the security guard would ring all the bells and warn everyone.” she continued in pain, “With every step I would remember so many details of my life. My life and youth were gone without warning.”

At that night, the woman cried a lot. She could not calm down. Every explosion shook her body before shaking the building. At dawn, she went to see what happened to the place. She described the scene from the first sight as the “earthquake” that destroyed the neighborhood.

“When I got there I couldn't find my homes or my son's home, but I found the wool balls I bought to sew (?) my grandchildren their winter clothes. These balls, which were covered with **بارود** are the only memory left of my beautiful home.” the mother talked. She paused a little, the continued speaking: “My son's (Ghassan) home was prepared with the best kinds of furniture. My daughter rented a flat in the apartment, and in one night all of us became in the streets. And now we live in my sister's house, who lives in the United States.”

Shaima'a and Her Sister Survived a Massacre which Killed all their Family Members

While the family of Ra'afat Odda Zu'arub were hiding in their house from the Israeli rockets and missiles during Operation Protective Edge, the occupying forces targeted that house with three F-16 rockets without a previous warning whatsoever. It was such a horribly tragic massacre that it took the Civil Defense crewmembers and the tens of residents more than 10 hours to pull out the dead bodies of the family that were buried under the rubble.

Three members of the family survived, whereas fifteen members of the resident relatives had been killed, among the martyrs, was the owner of the house Ra'afat Zu'arub, 35, and his wife Ahlam Zu'arub, 30, and her aging mother Subha Zu'arub, 50, and her sister Soad Zu'arub, 30, and other sister Suha Zu'arub, 30, and her sons Rami, Amir, Rawan, Walid, Shahid, Mo'atasim, Khalid, Hamada and Oday.

The occupation wasn't satisfied with the crime it committed, so it went after the rescued of the Zu'arub family in Abu-Yousif Al-Najjar hospital that was struck by a military tank missile located in East Rafah. The medical crew had to move the patients and the wounded to Al-Kuwaiti hospital in one of the cruelest crimes of this occupation in this aggression against a hospital filled with the wounded and martyrs.

Shaima'a Zu'arub, 18, who survived the massacre said, "We were sitting in the house when the Israeli rockets came from everywhere falling on our heads. I didn't know what happened to the place, I just woke up in the ICU with fractures and wounds to my body."

The moment Shaima'a woke up in the hospital, she started asking about her family especially her father and mother. The answers was so difficult to hear. Who's going to tell her that all her family and her aunts' families who sought shelter to her house, running for their lives away from the bombing, had been killed? Her aunt Um Mohammad says about those moments, "We were all shocked by the news. three families of ours are gone in a blink of an eye. All of them were of women and children." She proceeds, "Shaima'a insisted to be told about her family's situation. We told her about the tragedy praying she could get her self together and endure the painful shock."

Shaima'a suffers from many burns all over her body, including her face. Um Muhammad says, "Shaima'a was screaming many times from the pain, the pain of fractures and burns all over her body, and another of losing her entire family."

Shaima'a survived the massacre, and her aunt Um Muhammad asked the doctors to put the sisters in the same room of the hospital, so that they may feel a bit secure. Now both of them are living in their aunt's house and are still suffering from a hard psychological state that prevents them from sleeping.

The Occupation Kills the Disabled in their Care Center

Five days after the Offensive, the news continued talking about targeting new military and civilian buildings, but no one expected those Israeli war rockets would make it to the institution of Mercy for caring for the disabled.

The crime that killed two disabled women (mentally and physically) happened inside the building on Saturday, July 12, 2014, as the Israeli aircrafts fired one missile at about 4:42 right where the building was on the east of Beit Lahia's Gym.

Suha Abu Seda, 38, and Ola Wshahy, 31, died, and four other women were injured and burned in different parts of their body, three of them were disabled, plus their nurse Salwa Darweesh Abu El Qumsan, 53 years old.

Salwa was comforting Suha by telling her the shelling doesn't mean anything when the military attacked. Suha was afraid of the invasions and of the fierce aggression that got worse every hour, but everyone in the room was saying that they are safe, and that they are in an exceptional place, but what happened was shocking and hard to imagine... The occupation bombed the center in the twelfth of July, as Salwa said.

This woman, who worked hard to care for the disabled said: "I have never imagined that one day the Israeli force would dare bomb a center that cares for extremely disabled people. The attack caused two women to die, and destroyed the whole building."

The nurse added: "The crime happened at the moment I was trying to keep the women safe. They were afraid of the raids around us, and then they became the center of the attack with their weak, disabled bodies."

She wonders about the mistakes made by Hala and Suha and the other four, who were burned and wounded deeply, with two of them in the intensive care. Salwa said: "They did not point any rocket on Israel. They are disabled on wheelchairs. They thought they were safe". Salwa continued: "Suha was afraid of the bombing, and she became more afraid whenever a missile drops near us. Ola tried to be close to her and comfort her, and being close made them leave together."

The Smell of Rotten is Better than Death

With a sad face, she began talking about the struggle they faced when the bombs reached around their house. Hanan Abu Askar said, "On the day the missiles made it to our region, my husband and I became filled with depression. We have five children and we did not know how to protect them. That confusion paralyzed my brain. I did not know where to put them to protect them."

Akram Abu Askar, the best plumber in Jabalia, said, "When the blind missiles started exploding I left my apartment and went to my mom and brother's apartment below mine, hoping that it would be safer, but the shrapnel reached the house too."

The woman talked about her children's screams and how they were holding onto her because they were afraid of the shrapnel. She took out the thick winter blankets and covered them in the middle of summer to protect them from the broken windows and shrapnel.

The creative solutions were not enough for the protection of the children. The sound increased. The father held his children tightly and told them he would do anything to keep them safe. Indeed, Akram started moving and he brought very big plastic bags and started putting his children in them. Everyone was looking at him in surprise.

Hanan says, "In that moment, I forgot my fear and began laughing. I had no idea what my husband was doing!" She continued, "Akram went to the house door and took some of his tools with him. None of us knew what he was doing. A little later he came back and told the children to go out. I asked him what he was doing, he told me to be quiet and bring the jewelry and money that we spent our whole life making."

The wife did what she was asked, and then the father held the money and took his children out while his wife watched him. The father opened the hole of the sewer he had emptied earlier. He gave his children his will before they went into the sewers.

Akram said. "Goodbye, my most precious. I

ask you to be the best parents and the best supporters for each other. This money is yours. Keep it and take care of yourselves. Stay down, and if you hear the house bombed and destroyed don't get out unless the bombing stops."

The children couldn't leave their father. They told him they wanted to die with him and their mom. The father said. "Be quiet and stay down and don't be afraid for God will be with you." Leila, one of the children, talked about that situation with shining eyes. "We were afraid of the insects and dirt around us. The well was dirty and full of insects and it smelled rotten that we could not handle. Our feet hurt us from standing up all the time. I swear to God it would have been better to stay in a tomb than that sewer."

She continued, "My siblings and I were so afraid. We felt the minutes pass very slowly and the sound of explosions kept getting louder. We were afraid that the house would collapse over our parents and we would go out and never find our family or that the ruins will cover the well and we would be stuck." She added, "We would stay calm by telling ourselves that God will protect us and if he wants us dead we will die between our parents' arms, and if he wants us alive we will live even if we were on fire."

The mother sighed and said, "At that time I did nothing but cry. I held my head with my hands because I felt it was heavier than my body. My worry about my children was tearing me and made me forget about the missile sounds."

"We spent the night awake. My husband would go every now and then to check on the children and tell them that we're fine too," the mother continued, "I didn't want them to get sick so I heated a lot of water and brought disinfectant, they showered, I hugged them and apologized to them for what happened even though a thousand apologies would not heal what's in their heart."

In the morning the mom cleaned her children again, then moved them to her parents' house where they could rest and stay away from the explosions.

They are all in the Street

In one of the streets of Al Naser neighborhood in the middle of Gaza city, the scene looks horrifying as it is different from any other scene; the two-way road has a group of destroyed houses, and on the other side the house owners look devastated.

Every house had its share of destruction. At 6 am, the IDF called Al Ghalayeeny's and told them that they have five minutes to leave the house because it will be bombed. Fawzya Abd El Hady said: "We woke up to the sound of an explosion. Few minutes later we were told that the house next to ours was going to be bombed. I started yelling that I could not walk on my feet until my son came and got me out of the house, because we lived near the house they were going to bom, and I watched it fall down."

She continued: "My son stood in the road, took his breath and waited until the situation is calm again, so I asked him to take me back home. I stayed on the ground floor and in less than an hour the noise started spreading all over the place. At that moment my grandson carried me and took me to the beginning of the road."

She added: "... and a few minutes later I found all my family members surrounding me. They told me that the house of Al Bawwab's family will be destroyed. In five minutes the house got bombed. After that moment I remember nothing but being in my daughter's house."

The woman had fainted because of how scary and fast things had gone. When she opened her eyes she realized that her son's wife was injured in her head and she was in a risky state. The woman described the day as the (black day).

Abd El Hady's family got busy with their son's injured wife, Donia, who is a mother of six boys, all children. Mohammed Abd El Hady (40 years old) said: "After my brother's wife went to the hospital, I went back home to take photos of the neighborhood houses as I work as a journalist, but when I looked at the sky I noticed strange plane movements, so I immediately rushed out of the house. That was at 12 pm."

One hour later, the Israeli occupation decided to displace fifty people who had lived in the three story house of Abd El Hady, when they got a call from one of the IDF officers and ordered them to leave the house.

The view was different in the ground floor of one of the houses; the whole building was destroyed, except for one store, which was organized and cleaned by the men who also added some furniture for the family to sleep in.

Abd El Hady said: "My mother refuses the idea of me spending time in a room threatened to be destroyed at any moment, but I saw that room safer and more secure from a public shelter. The remains of this house holds its warmth, but the shelters are cold."

Too-ta Too-ta, Nuseibah is woven with her tears, Hadota

The dog ran away my little girl when it heard the voice of the wicked approaching. The white dog walked far away, and his friend the princess Nuseibah, didn't find it when she returned to her beautiful palace. So she went to her father crying, and told him that the wicked stole the palace and that the dog, the bird, the pictures that adorned the wall of her room, and her friend "Snow Princess" have all gone to paradise. Too-ta too-ta, the story isn't over. The nine year old child is still looking for her friend, her dog "Bobby", the bird, and her palace.

The child Nuseibah Al-Barrawi who shouted at her family, "You are lying, I don't live in a palace. I'm in a graveyard and the Israelis have killed my friend and my dog, burnt my books and my clothes, and she bursted into tears before she went unconscious.

Her mother held her in her arms and started to wipe her little face and her hair. She said, "My daughter is no longer as before, she lost her joyful spirit. She has become an old tired woman, and I can't make her happy. All I can do is embrace her warmly, perhaps it can relieve a bit of her pain. The girl fell asleep in her mother's arms and she went on, "Every time the occupying forces invade East Gaza they destroy a part of our house and my husband tries to repair it. Every time we have to taste the bitterness of displacement away from our warm home. We sleep out in the open air and in the best case, under a roof with no covers. In this aggression, our house became a pile of rubble, with no way to repair it."

The family lost all that they have under the rubble of the house, and they ran away for their lives with only a few clothes to cover their bodies, some even without shoes. Nuseibah the lighthearted child ran away screaming and crying barefooted, and her mother heard her calling her dog Bobby during the escape.

Her mother added. "When we reached the shelter, we tried to convince her that Bobby ran away, and they'll get it when the shooting stops, and she fell for it. When the aggression ended, she went back to her house thinking that she'd take her toys and bird, and that her little dog will be waiting for her. However, she was shocked by the devastated house, and couldn't even recognize its location due to the obliterated area after the attack. All the neighbors' house became a pile of rubble as well"

The mother's tears flowed as she was looking at her daughter who was half awake and spoke with a voice closer to a whisper, "We were sleeping when the explosions got closer, then I tried to bring my sisters Khitab and Sama. I stumbled from fear until my mother brought them instead of me and we both ran off. I couldn't get my Eid clothes and toys so I left them behind. Ramadan ended and Eid came while I was still in my old clothes."

Nuseibah looked at her mother who wondered in pain and heartache, "Isn't it the right of children to have a safe life? Why don't they provide that for our children in Gaza?! Why are our children forced to experience pain and bitterness of loss without any guilt?! Why should their memories be programmed with scenes of murder and death, and their ears forced to hear the sounds of missiles and bombings? Why this double standard when dealing with our children. If an Israeli girl lost her dog, they resent our children. If our children lost their lives, we don't even find anyone grieving for them."

Um Ahmad .. The Occupation Killed her Refugee Husband and Destroyed her House

On the 4th floor of one of Al-Nada buildings, Um Ahmad, 38, lived difficult days with her husband Saeed and her five children (2 daughters, 3 sons). This woman struggled rough conditions, its agony, and the strenuous health condition (mental illness) of her daughter. Then came Operation Protective Edge to make things worse for this family by taking away the father and demolishing the house in a mercilessly.

Um Ahmad says, "The bombing was everywhere. It continued leaving us not knowing where it's targeting and what happened to people due to power outages. During this moment, the residents of the building decided to gather at the ground floor." She proceeds, "We tried to call the Red Cross and the Red Crescent to evacuate the people from the place. The smell of gas began to suffocate the children and nauseate them. My husband prepared wet cloths and told the people to breathe through them so they don't inhale the toxic gas. The ambulances started to arrive, and the priority was for those who were unconscious."

During the evacuation of children and injured people, the rest began to look for the nearest shelter and among those refugees was Um Ahmad's family. Her husband carried his handicapped daughter and she carried her baby while the rest of the family walked with them. Um Ahmad says, "We were under threat and hastened our steps, and after great suffering we reached my father's house in the Jabalia Camp. Because the small size and crowdedness of the house, my husband and my oldest son had to stay that the UN Abu-Hussein preparatory school. There, the time passed arduously for this family. Um Ahmad called her husband daily to check on him and he would too. She says, "My husband would check on us every single day and get whatever food or clothes that we needed."

On July 30, precisely at 4 am, the Israeli cannons started shelling North Gaza and the Tal Al-za'atar area with heavy missiles. While the hours ran by during this ferocious attack and the strikes continued, Um Ahmad's brother received a phone call at 7 am telling him that Saeed had died in the missile attack on the Abu Hussein School with 16 other martyrs. Um Ahmad and her children were traumatized.

Um Ahmad who was in shock went to the school to see the place where her husband died. She declared, "I went to the school to find his blood on the floor. He died with 16 others, most of them were locals." She adds, "I didn't get to say goodbye to him. My people and neighbors had to bury him because of the brutality of the aggression."

He's gone. The kind father who was a great friend to his children. Um Ahmad and her children went back to their house's rubble so that they may find something to commemorate their father, but the occupation denied them of that too.

Um Eskandar Al Kafarna Spent the War Among the Schools, Parks and Streets.

The fifty-year-old woman, Um Eskandar Al Kafarna, with her family that consists of 18 members (children and grandchildren) in a house threatened to collapse at any minute because it was bombed in the Offensive. The decision made to live in that house occurred when they could not offer renting a house after the attacked bombed their 5 story house (10 flats).

In the next week of the attack, the bombs started furiously falling on Beit Hanoun, so, the Kafarna's were forced to leave their house and run away from death to Beit Hanoun School, thinking that it could be safer. There, the missiles followed them and started bombing the school, so they went to the municipality park in Gaza City.

Um Eskandar described those painful moments saying: "We could only think that death was close and that we should run away from home immediately because it was not safe anymore." Um Eskandar continued: "We kept moving until we reached the city of Gaza. We spent two days in the park and two days around the mosques and two days on the street, then we went back to the municipality park." Not living in a public shelter banned Um Eskandar from getting food or water, so the family had to accept the food that was given to them by the other families.

Um Eskandar said: "Accepting the situation was psychologically difficult for us. Our emotions were destroyed. We almost died even before the missiles reached us. Even now I still cannot believe how we survived this pain."

Um Eskandar is now trying to adapt the circumstances regardless the bitterness. She has to accept the fact that she has no home but a space on the ground she prepared for her family to live in. she also works hard to clean the ruins in some of the ground floor rooms. She says: "I hope my family and I survive what the winter would cause for us. I struggle to protect my family from the cold and I work hard to make at least a room or two, relying on the help of God, to protect ourselves from the danger above us."

Um Murad Al-Masri: Wounds Reopened for a Mother of Two Martyrs

In Al-Masrien Street, Beit Hanoun, Um Murad Al-Masri kept her 14 sons and daughters with her grandchildren in a multi leveled house. This 49 year old mother was stunned by Operation Protective Edge that bombed her house forcing her to leave her home leaving behind the body shreds of her son Kamal. The crimes continued to follow her as while she was in the refugee center came the awful news that she lost her second son.

Um Murad told us about her pain during this aggression. She said, "We stayed in our house for a short period after the start of the aggression, soon enough we were forced to leave our home on the sixth day of the aggression. When we woke up to a very loud explosion that shook the entire area. She proceeds, "We thought the bombing was at our neighbors' house and due to the power outage we couldn't see each other. My husband rushed and got the flashlight and we started evacuating the women and children." Because of the chaos of this situation the parents couldn't find their son Kamal who was on the upper floor. They rushed to check on him only to find the trauma that the bombing targeted the upper floor and killed Kamal. Um Murad says, "I saw my son's body in pieces on his bed. His blood was all over the room and his foot was cut off." Um Murad screamed and fell down unconscious and didn't wake up until she was in the ambulance. She had a hard time in the hospital; every time she woke up and comprehended again that Kamal, 23, had died and was left at the house, she would collapse again.

After this crisis, the Al-Masri family sought refuge in the UNRWA schools. While she was recovering from the shock of losing Kamal, the father received a phone call that forced him leave to the hospital. Um Murad says, "He told me that Mohammad was slightly injured in Beit-Hanoun, but I felt the chills into my body and I had a feeling I can't describe. I said instinctively " Oh my dear son, Mohammed, you're a martyr! The ladies around me started calming me down saying, "Oh Um Murad, your son is fine. Don't overreact, it's just an injury."

Mohammad, 23, was injured by a direct missile that hit him while he was in his house, which he refused to evacuate and go to the refugee center. His mother narrates, "He was severely injured and every time his father and the ambulance tried to get close to the house in order to get him out, they were showered with tens of missiles. The situation stayed the same until his father managed to pull him out. Muhammad stayed in the ICU in Al-Shifa'a hospital for a while before he followed his brother Kamal."

The aggression ended, and Um Murad went back to inspecting the destruction of her home. Um Murad says about these moments, "I remembered my sons and remembered when Kamal used to ask me for his cup of tea while studying. In the end, I lost the most precious possessions, my sons."

Um Mohammed and the Aggression

"Unfortunately," Um Mohammed says, "I became homeless with my family as a result of being forced to seek refuge, and we were denied to take any of our belongings before they became just a pile of rubble making our home unrecognizable. She adds, "The Israeli military forces advanced towards the borders so we decided to leave the house. But the tanks were faster than us and they would decide our fate of loss. Everything was destroyed in their way targeting even humanity with their arrogance and ignorance. We were separated and ran in different directions; my children in one direction, and myself and others in another."

Um Mohammed adds with a choked voice, "It was a very hard night. My grandchildren and children headed towards an UNRWA school to seek refuge. I didn't know where my other children went."

She continues, "After reaching the school we checked to make sure everyone was there. But I couldn't find my son Esam and his family. We called his phone again and again but he didn't answer. And after some time he answered and assured me that he went to his nearby sister's house with his children."

She adds, "When I heard that the Abu Hussein UN school had been bombed, I didn't sleep and cried all night. I was scared for my children and grandchildren's lives. There was no safe place; not schools, not hospitals, not houses." She narrates, "After the announcement of the first ceasefire, I went with my sons to check on our house. And I was shocked to find my 4 story home had turned into a pile of rubble. I fell unconscious and didn't wake up until returning to the school. We are innocent people. We are not part of any political parties and we don't impose a threat on anyone. But the Israeli military wants the murder of every Palestinian and the destruction

of our lives in every aspect."

She says, "Of course our lives are more valuable than our wealth. But, it is difficult for our house to vanish at once. I spent my whole life in it. My old age didn't protect me from losing my house and the shelter of my children. My crisis is big. We live in a school with no life, stability and assurance. It's just a temporary shelter until relief."

"I built my home stone by stone. In it I created my memories, happiness, and sadness. My children grew up and got married in it. What did my home do in order for it to be destroyed by Israeli weaponry? They took it forcefully from me in a blink of an eye."

"I am an old lady with diabetes and hypertension. I fast for days so that I don't have to go to the bathroom because I can't walk and the bathrooms in the school are far away from the classroom I am in."

The grandmother Um Mohammed hugs her grandchild and says, "I suffer from weak vision because of how much I cried over my husband who died one year ago. This is why I use the bathroom in the room. And we cover each other using curtains, but tell me how can I cover myself with over 50 people in one classroom?" In a trembling voice she says, "We are tired and we cannot continue this life much longer. What's happening goes much further than what we can tolerate. Why can't we live like human beings- in safety and stability and dignity?" The grandmother Um Mohammed lives her days between nostalgia and crying because of the memory of her home and destroyed olive trees." The Israeli occupation doesn't understand how much she and other Palestinians are rooted in this land and in their olive trees.

Um Nedal: A Widow Facing Operation Protective Edge with her Orphans

From the beginning of the aggression of Operation Protective Edge, the situation was extremely tragic for the widow Um Nedal Miqdad. She had to face this aggression against the entire Gaza Strip on her own. She had to protect her children and take the decision to seek refuge.

We went to speak to this widow while she sat in her tent laid above the rubble of her home in the Nada Towers North of Gaza City. At times she would caress one of her five son's hair and at others she would button her other son's shirt.

Um Nedal, 51, says, "These towers were hit with white toxic gas that caused my daughter to fall unconscious. Later, the bombing intensified forcing all the residents to gather downstairs on the ground floor waiting for the Red Cross to come save them. And that's what actually happened."

Um Nedal rushed to take her children to her sister's house in the Awda Towers. She spent two days there but because of the lack of space and because her neighbors returned to their homes, she returned to hers in the Nada Towers. She was assured for a short period of time that the situation would calm down, but her assurance failed her on the second day, July 22nd. The Israeli Occupying Forces called her neighbor, Waseem Hamouda, demanding evacuation of the towers because it was set to be demolished. Um Nedal says, "Our neighbors' voices intensified as they urged everyone to run away. I joined the neighbors with my children without knowing what was going on, stumbling everywhere. Some women ran out with their head coverings out of fear." She added, "We headed towards the Jabalia Camp at one of our friends and we stayed with them for 30 days. It was the hardest time of my life. Thirty people lived in one room. The weather was extremely hot. Our bodies exhausted from fasting. We suffered tremendously from the power outage, water shortage, and scarcity of food.

Um Nedal pulled through those difficult days until they announced the cease fire. She felt that the nightmare was over and returned to her home shocked by the destruction she witnessed. It was beyond what she had imagined.

Um Nedal was speechless in this moment. A year before the destruction of her home, Um Nedal had lost her husband. She sighed as though all that she had just expressed in agony had returned heavily on her chest. No one can forget the pain of this aggression. Um Nedal continued, "What doesn't kill me, makes me stronger. I learned patience, steadfastness, and faith in God and his fate and power.

Um Saleh The Mother of Three Martyrs Who Were Killed Before She Prepared Their "Suhoor"

Um Saleh Mo'amer and her sons were watching with grief the horrific scenes on TV of Al-Shejaeya Massacre the Israeli occupation forces committed on the 20th of July when suddenly an Israeli rocket startled her three sons, Mohammad, 30, Hamza, 24, and Anas, 17, and tore them apart, relieving them of the agonizing grief.

The occupation killed the three brothers in their house at Al-Junina, East Rafah, South Gaza by a rocket. On that day, Mohammad asked his brother Anas to make coffee while their middle brother Hamza and their mother were busy watching the news of the random strikes on the residents' houses at Al-Shejaeya neighborhood East of Gaza.

Um Saleh, who's still retrieving the memories of her sons together, says "We were sitting and watching the horrible carnages the occupation committed on TV, and in a moment our house became a new crime scene for this colonizer. The house was bombed by one rocket that took out my three sons who were gathered together, leaving their dead bodies scattered in front of me in a sight I can't describe.

The anguished mother went on saying, "Until this

moment I can't believe what happened, I went to make Suhoor while they were drinking their coffee, then I came back horrified as I heard the blast and the scene of my children's torn bodies." The oldest son Mohammed had died leaving three children behind him (two daughters and a son), and a wife who never stopped weeping for her dead husband. Um Saleh said goodbye her sons for the last time said a prayer to God asking for justice and retribution. She states "What have my boys done to be killed mercilessly and without reason? The reason can't be justified except by the fact that those who had committed this crime aren't human beings and they represent the occupying state." Defeatedly she adds, "Israel obliterated my dreams and took my sons from me in a blink of an eye. Israel broke my heart into pieces and stole any joy that could've come to my world."

Um Saleh lives with severe pain. At times she thinks of her grandchildren, who are now orphans, at times she thinks of the cancelled plans for Hamza's wedding, and at times she thinks of the preparations she made for Anas's enrollment into high school next year. Only this time she think of these things in solitude, without her three children.

Um Said's House Was a Shelter for the Emigrants and their Suffering

"How I prayed for this war to end so everybody would go back to their homes. I hosted eighty five people. It was a heavy and exhausting duty." That is how Um Said briefly described her struggle in the war. She worked hard with her family to cover the need of everybody who lived in their three story house in Al Nasser Street.

The emigrants came from al Toffah and al Shejaya neighborhoods. They were her husband's family, her father-in-law's daughters, their sons' wives, their married daughters, their married granddaughters, Um Said's brother-in-law's married daughters, their children and their husbands, her married sister and her children and her sick mother. All came on the eleventh of Ramadan and stayed until the end of war.

Once they came home, the first thing she thought about was bringing everyone mattresses and blankets. She only had six mattresses. She gave them all her children's mattresses while the children slept on the floor. She said: "Providing food was financially exhausting. We would spend 500 Shekels a day for food only, other than the rest of the needs. We continued to provide the food for whole week. The next week my cousin who trades with frozen food called me and asked me if I needed any food because he was giving them for everybody before they spoil because there was no electricity."

She added: "He did not know about all those people in my house. I told him I had emigrants and I indeed needed large quantities of food, and for one week I received a lot of fish and meat for everybody, then we went back to providing food from our own money until the end of war."

This huge number of Um Said's house was confusing to her. Her 8-member family and she were used to quietness and privacy, and they

didn't have to spend a lot of money for living. "Before the attack the banks were closed, and selling in our store was weak and we did not have enough money."

She said: "My husband prepared 800 Abaya to sell the women during the summer and Eid. We needed the money, so he asked our children to sell them on the shelter doors for 50 shekels even though they worth 80 shekels. I felt sad seeing my children call people to buy the clothes. They felt humiliated because they haven't done anything like that before."

Needing the money was not the only reason for the decision to sell the clothes. "We saw the people run away from their homes. Everybody was running. The women were barefooted and wearing their home clothes. We thought it would be good to benefit them as well by selling them the Abayas for cheap especially because most of them left their homes without taking any money with them."

Even though Um Said and her husband took good care of the emigrants, she said: "I was emotionally very tired. They would treat us as if they own the house and we are their guests. They would sit on the stairs and search the bags that my children get as if they paid for the things in them."

She remembered: "One day we received a food package which had milk boxes in it. I thought to myself that I wanted to make rice pudding. I searched for the milk in the three floors but I didn't find it. They hid it, and I, the owner of the house, did not know where it was."

And regarding the water she said: "Can you believe we spent five thousand liter of water every day? Thank God we have a well of our own, but bringing the water up to the barrels above

costs 50 shekels a day.”

It seems like a lot of water was wasted when everybody in Gaza tried to economize in consumption during the war. Um Said told the reason angrily: “I have never seen such wasting in water usage. Yes, there were a lot of people, but for them to shower twice a day, that was a disaster.”

She continued: “One day I saw them wash their clothes in the cooking pots. I went crazy. I told them what you’re doing would make you sick. I bought you big plastic sinks to wash. They pretended to not see them, even though they were right next to the pots in the kitchen.”

She sighed: “They affected our family a lot, but though I was annoyed by them, I was still sad. The occupation completely destroyed some of their houses in Al Shejayeia during the indiscriminate bombing. They lost everything without a warning.”

She continued: “I was going between my duty towards my family, especially my daughters who were so scared and so tired and lost a lot of weight during the war, and my duty towards the emigrants and taking care of them. They were my guests after all. Thank God the nightmare is over.”

Um Said is one of many who deserve the appreciation for their effort and hard work to help take care of the homeless in their home, as it is not easy to be responsible for one more person in abnormal situations like the war.



Um Tha'er Al-Masri: Israeli occupation destroyed a house that took ten years away from home

Right after Protective Edge, Um Tha'er Al-Masri, 43, ran to gather her 14-member family. She's responsible for this family after her husband left the country for work ten years ago. This lady who lives in Al-Boura area, Beit Hanoun, North Gaza, never expected that her two-story house, which took her husband ten years of work away from the country to build, will be demolished in one second by the Israeli occupation airstrike.

Um Tha'er tells us, "The Israeli airplanes struck randomly all throughout Beit-Hanoun. I had to seek refuge for the sake of my family life. We were running in the streets, bombing was everywhere, and we were praying to God to reach to a safe place."

After a harsh evacuation, Um Tha'er reached to her uncle's house which is located in a suburb of Beit-Hanoun. The house included more than 30 people from her extended family who had fled from areas near the borders. Soon enough, the bombing started getting closer to the house and this area was announced as a closed military zone"

Um Tha'er says, "We fled again and went to the Jabalia Camp for our only option this time was the UNRWA Abu Hussein School in which we found the situation was miserable." She proceeds, "There were more than 50 refugees in one classroom. Overcrowding imposed lots of pain on us. I have high blood pressure and heart disease, the medical care at school isn't enough, and infectious diseases were a threat to all of us."

Um Tha'er adds, "I was very sad, during the ceasefires because we couldn't enter Beit-Hanoun for it was a closed military zone throughout this aggressive time. I prayed to God day and night to be able to go back to my house with my kids."

The aggression was over, Um Tha'er went back to her house and was shocked by what she saw. She couldn't even locate her house as a result of the mass destruction, and she tells us, "My son led me to my wrecked house. All my life's efforts turned into a pile of rubble, I couldn't hold the tears in my eyes and started weeping and crying. I walked through my house rubble looking for something I can benefit from but to no avail."

Um Mohammed... A Widow who cannot Handle Losing more Loved Ones

Everybody in Gaza suffered under the fire. They handled all the tragic experiences that humans cannot handle, but Um Mohammed, 38 years old, had a different experience as a widow and a mother of six children; the oldest is fifteen and the youngest, who kept asking her mother if they would go to their father when they die in the war, is eight.

She took care of her children on her own. The one thing she feared the most was "having the neighbors evacuate and leave me along without telling me, and I didn't have a husband to tell me when we should leave. I was afraid of leaving the house to ask about what's happening in the neighborhood."

Um Mohammed became emotionally and financially exhausted. After she had gone back to her damaged house, she had to sell her last golden earrings and ring to fix the windows facing the street: "I did not expect the aluminum and glass to be so expensive, but we have to stay secure, and when the aid comes we can fix the rest of the house."

Because she is a widow, Um Mohammed received a small gift from one of the charity institutions to help her live: "It was a fish farm project. I would grow fish on the roof and would water the plants with the fish water. We would eat some of the fish and we would sell some. I grew all the vegetables I needed. I did not buy any from the market, but the missiles destroyed my project."

She continued: "I'm from Al Toffah neighborhood. I moved to Al Shejaya in my parent's house in the middle of Ramadan. I spent a week there and then the massacre happened. We then moved out to Al Mohandeseen apartment building in Al Remal with twenty families. We all stayed on one floor."

She pointed to a small corridor next to us: "We slept here from the beginning of the war until some night in the middle of Ramadan, that is when the missiles hit everything in Al Shaaf and Al Toffah, and when the neighbors left, I went to Al Shejaya."

Um Mohammed, 35, went to Al Shejaya hoping that it would be safer by her parents and siblings in their four story house.

"We were on the second floor after the Iftar. We did not realize that the fourth floor was targeted and on fire until the neighbors came to rescue us," she said, "we left the house immediately with whatever we were wearing. My oldest daughter forgot her

headscarf so she went back to get it and expected us to be waiting for her, but when she came out from the house none of us was there, so she kept running until she found the whole neighborhood hiding in the house of Al Sukkar."

She described: "My daughter fainted once she saw me. She woke up an hour later. She could not move her left arm or leg until the next morning. All I felt when my daughter fainted was that I would lose her. I was yelling at her to wake up."

At that fateful night, Israel went too far with its arrogance; the whole Shejaya area was targeted with indiscriminate bombs. Sukkar's house became a shelter to tens of citizens, and Um Mohammed's family was one of them. The Red Cross and ambulances could not make it there to help them evacuate because of the intense bombing.

She said: "When dawn arrived, we prepared to leave in cars; each car would take some people to the highway then come back and take more people. It was a risky venture, but we were followed by death and we had no other choice."

She continued: "The car was supposed to run very fast and in a straight line, but we got lost and the driver had to stop to ask for directions when the ambulance car yelled at the people to run. That's when I thought that the car would be bombed and we would die."

With extreme sorrow: "I have never imagined that I would live a scene like that; where people are fleeing and the sound of explosions is so loud. I don't know what was not targeted in this war. What happened is so unfair for all of us."

Um Mohammed made it to Al Mohandeseen building: "There were no mattresses or necessities of life. Each family had a wall to sleep next to. We were 30 people in one room. The men slept in the hallway."

She looked at her kids around us: "I am used to raising them as fatherless and being responsible for everything, but when we went to my brother's house in Al Muhandeseen building, I felt devastated when I saw my children looking at the other children's father hugging their children and comforting them."

After the war, Um Mohammed went back to her house even though it was damaged. She fixed what she could fix, praying for war to never happen again, as she could not handle losing another person she loves.

We Made It Just in Time

"I woke up from my sleep horrified more than once, and every time I heard the sounds of the missiles and aircraft drones, and would see myself drowning in my own blood. I saw my mother doing nothing except staring into our faces, my father silently listening to news with his old radio, and my grandma praying Al-Isha for the third time, probably because she wanted to die as a martyr while praying. My sister Hala, whose house was demolished, was embracing her son in the darkness and singing him to sleep while my little sister seemed withered during the bombing, lighting a candle and crying scared of death."

Sabreen Abu Rukba, 22, who lives in Alrayes mountain still remembers the incidents of the Shejaeya massacre where there were tens of victims between nightfall and dawn. She said, "Four families stayed at our house and shared the first four days of the barbaric aggression with us. When the bombing intensified, they fled with the others who ran away."

The girl continued with all the details she kept in her memory, "We heard the sound of people running from death. Some of them left their loved ones lying on the street in pools of blood. Our neighbors evacuated their houses and the families that were living in our house left. We were terrified and we asked our father if we can leave the house, but he refused and agreed with my brothers on staying home."

Sabreen added, "The sound of explosions was pacing, and we received a call from my uncle worried for our lives asking us to leave the house immediately and he told us that they were so close to death if it wasn't for God's protection."

She said painfully, "The days passed and we didn't leave the house. It was written by God that we would stay alive and witnesses what would happen in Al-Shejaeya. In my 22 years I survived three wars, but I haven't seen a more ferocious or brutal one as the fourth night of the ground attack. We were waiting for death while looking to the lights caused by the explosions. We tried to sleep but as the sound of missiles didn't cease, and we were staring at each other in fear asking ourselves if we were still alive?"

She continued, "Death was so close to the point that we were sitting quietly waiting for it, our tongues reciting the testament (I witness that there is no God but Allah) with every strike. Their terror lasted days and days in Al Shejaeya and all the nights were the same. We all looked the similar: the same pale faces, the same wish to die together or to live together, the same way of talking, and the same fake laughs when someone joked. And we would spring in joy when we heard the radio host saying there's negotiations for a ceasefire."

Sabreen didn't expect that her family's house was one of the targeted houses, that a scout would fire one rocket at our home forcing them to leave. She said, "We didn't expect that our house would be one of the targeted houses and for it to be demolished without any warning. They targeted it with one rocket and the neighbors came to try to save us."

Sabreen continued, "The rocket that fell on our house didn't explode, and I ask myself, 'What if it did?' I remember my neighbor's child who was covered in his blood. He was murdered while playing in his house yard, and his father carried him running, but the Israeli forces shot him dead."

Words Cannot Describe Naeema's Pain

This tanned, very thin woman is carrying one bucket after another of the remnants of her house. The sound of the ruins falling out of the overfilled bucket is merging with the sound of the stones being swept away by her older son and the coughing of the people because of the dust around them that came from cleaning the house that has nothing left but some columns and two broken ceilings.

Naeema Al Atawna thought that the war would last for a few days, and because her house is on top of Al Rayyes Hill in Al Shaaf Neighborhood, she visited her uncle's house that is about a 100 meter away and stayed there until the night of the twelfth of Ramadan when the region was attacked by artillery shells.

She said: "The bombs began to fall at 8 pm. At 10 we were sure the situation was only going to get worse, so we left under the shelling to find a safe place. We were scared all night, moving from one place to another until we got close to Al Daraj neighborhood and away from that hell."

She continued: "We were running. We did not notice the time. We did not care about the time. We only wanted to survive. I would keep my children in front of me and I stayed in the back to make sure they were ok and that I don't lose them."

At 6 am the woman, in her forties, arrived with her husband and eight children to Al Daraj School, which became a shelter to save families that were forced to leave their homes in Al Shaaf and Al Toffah neighborhoods. Everybody laid on the ground to sleep. The school became their only shelter during and after the war.

She said: "My family and I were the first to go to that school, but more people showed up after Al Shejayya massacre. People fought for the water, and moving it to the classes for washing and cleaning was difficult. I have never imagined myself hanging my clothes on ropes in a school in front of everybody."

Painfully she said: "We would die every day at school. The number of people was huge. The children were barefooted. No food, no space, no comfort. We were 23 relatives in one room, and we had no privacy at all. Above all that there were also all the problems that happened because of our different habits, which

made it hard to deal with each other."

She said: "I have daughters. How can they go to the bathroom in school? We made a bathroom in the class. We used a bucket and surrounded it with fabric. The boys would shower there, but the girls would not."

Naeema went to her parents' house in Jabalia during the times she felt it was quiet outside for her and her daughters to shower and wash their prayer clothes that they would not take off day or night in the shelter, then she would go back to Al Daraj School in a long, tiring, and risky trip.

She looked around her with sad eyes: "Second day of the Eid we heard that the occupation bombed our house. When I went to see it I saw nothing. I could not find my house. It became an uninhabitable pile of rubble."

She said: "I missed sitting around with my children in one place; to know how they are doing. We came today to try to fix part of the house to live there, but it seems difficult; the house was old and the missiles broke the walls and the furniture and it looked like it could collapse at any time."

Angrily she said: "Israel took away all my rights. Everything I need, it's gone. If the house is gone, everything is gone. The house is a shelter and life, and without it I feel lost."

Naeema's husband is a taxi driver. He stopped working during the war. Naeema and her husband would have suffered from the strain of taking care of their children if it wasn't for the help of their families, even though she could not accept their help easily, as she described.

She sat silently for a while, sitting on one of her house's stones, looking at the horizon where there is nothing but more destroyed houses. I asked her what the saddest thing about the war was. She said: "Everything that happened made me sad. It's impossible to describe how I really feel. There is so much anger in my heart that I cannot express".

The attack took away the safe life from the women in Gaza Strip. 229 women have died along the way, while the rest of the women had to live the tragic experience of destruction, genocide, forced displacement, and other personal experiences.

Yusuf Wore his New Eid Clothes to Pass Away

In the first day of Eid el Fitr, Yusuf Abdulrahman Hassouna, 11, woke up early. He wore his green shirt and his jeans and went to do the Eid prayers. That Eid was painful as it was another day of Operation Protective Edge that Yusuf spent horrified, clutching in bed in his sleep. Every time he heard a bomb he would put his pillow on his head and ears so he doesn't hear the explosions.

Despite the painful circumstances, announcing a temporary ceasefire gave that child a chance to leave his house when he took a happy chance among all the fear and depression that he lived. He immediately asked his mother to let him out on the swing after the prayers, and she said yes. Suddenly, and without a warning, an Israeli missile hit Yusuf and his friends while playing around the swing. It was known as (the Eid Children Massacre) that killed 14 children and caused injuries to more than 20 people. When Yusuf's mother heard the bomb she ran where Yusuf went to play. She asked everybody about where he could be, and then she heard he was hit.

Yusuf's mother said: "I went straight to Al Shifa Hospital to see my son. I had no idea he would be among the martyrs. The bodies were charred and the body parts unrecognizable. Everybody gathered to see how was still alive.

She continues saying: "Yusuf died and his smell was filling the house, his clothes and his bed. What did my son do to die at this young age? He had no weapon. His only weapon was his ambitions and dreams. He only wanted to take the happy moments from the destruction and death".

Yusuf's mother wonders: "What did my son do to die in the day he finally became happy? Yusuf is gone. His notebook, his books and his clothes remind me of him every minute. He was active. He used to wake up early every day and get dressed and meet his friends to go to school together".

Yusuf was a good student. He was the best student every year. He took so many prizes. His mother said: "He would ask me to make him some foods that he liked, like pizza and maqlouba and msakhan. His demands increased in the last few days. I was not used to making him so much. I felt the need to hold him and kiss him for no reason".



Ferial...a Mother Who Received Her Three Martyred Sons While She Was a Refugee at the Hospital.

Ferial Isleem, 33 years old, evacuated her house in Al Shujayia at the day of the massacre on July 20th during Protective Edge offense. She was terrified and shocked by the horrors of the forcible displacement, and while she was running with the crowds, Ferial realized that two of her sons were not around. Scared as she was, Ferial had to accept the risk of sending her eldest son, Shady, to go there and bring back his siblings. As soon as Shady had reached his brothers, an Israeli air raid tore the three sons into pieces. The displaced mother could not even say good bye to her disfigured, dead children.

It all started at the early stages of the land incursion that targeted citizens' houses located at the eastern borders of Gaza. On July 20th, 2014 heavy successive shelling was everywhere. Then, Israeli forces threw leaflets for the residents, demanding them to evacuate the region in preparation for the invasion of the entire area.

Therefore, the majority of residents decided to leave their houses, but Ferial's husband refused. Driven by her extreme fear, Ferial cried, insisting on leaving. And so, they followed the rest of the refugees. Yet, her husband's brothers decided to evacuate the next day.

Ferial says, "At exactly 6:00 in the morning, my husband, my kids, and I headed out towards Al Mansora Street. There were so many people out there as if it had been Doom's Day. I cannot forget that scene; kids were crying, and shouting; there were elderlies who could not really walk; women who left their children behind because they were so terrified. What occupied my mind then was whether my family would make it safe and sound."

Ferial goes on, "As my family and I were running for our lives, I was praying to God to deliver us. I was repeating the two Shahadas, and reciting lots of Quran verses. Amidst the crowds, I realized that I had lost my two children: 12 year Ola, and 11 year Fady. I tried to find them, but in

vain. I went crazy; I could not stop shouting nor weeping. I looked everywhere but to no avail. My husband asked me to keep going forward, hoping to find them ahead of us."

During their journey, Ferial learned that her missing children were actually at a house that belonged to Ayyad family. So, her eldest son, Shady, who is 16 years old, took the risk of going back to get them. Meanwhile, the others resumed walking towards Al Shifa Hospital. No sooner had Shady arrived at the house his siblings were hiding at, the occupation forces raided the place, killing Ferial's three children.

Ferial was devastated by the news for she was waiting for her children to join her. The three martyrs were brought to Al Shifa hospital by an ambulance. The family was already there. When their father knew about their deaths, he tried to sidestep the news so as to ease the shock on her. So, he first told her that their kids were injured, yet she did not believe him. Ferial says, "When I woke up from the shock, they asked me to bid farewell only to my son Shady, but not Ola or Fady since their injury were hideous."

She wails, "They took away my life; they robbed me the dearest people to my heart. They murdered my kids. Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best disposer of affairs."

The assault is over, but the painful series of memories is unstoppable for Ferial. She cannot help but remember her three children from the day they were born and through all their age phases. Every day, she pictures them coming back from school, getting around the dining table to eat, and going to bed. She keeps recalling the past days when they were babies. "Everything in the house reminds me of them, their toys, clothes, belongings, and books. When I go to the kitchen to prepare food, I remember their favorite dishes, and I keep talking to myself, 'Shady loves Maqloba, Ola loves Maftool, and Fady loves rice.'" Ferial burst into tears.

Aisha, Her Mother and Three Sisters Were Killed in a Shelter

As if it was not enough for the Israeli occupation to leave the 8 year girl, Aisha Al Shenbary, as an orphan, yet it denied this girl from her parents as well as three sisters, while they were in an UNRWA school. Aisha became one of hundreds of children who became orphans owing to the Protective Edge aggression.

Aisha's father died three years ago in a car accident. He was married to three women, and had 23 male and female children. He left them in a small house that was barely spacious enough for them. Owing to the dire economic and social conditions this family had faced after their father's death, Aisha's mother preferred to put her and her two brothers at Al Amal Institute for Orphans."

As the aggression began, the Institute administration decided to send all orphan children back to their families for fear for their lives. Indeed, Aisha headed with her brothers to her house in Beit Hannon, South of Gaza. Their house was located in a severely dangerous border area, and was vulnerable to shelling by the Israeli tanks, which forced them to take refuge at a shelter in an UNRWA school. Aisha says, "We went to Beit Hanoun UNRWA School. After several days there, the Red Cross came and informed us that we needed to leave the place, and go to another more secure and less dangerous center."

After this decision, everyone started preparing to resort to another shelter. Aisha says, "Mom, Dad's second wife, and my sisters began to prepare our belongings preparing to leave the place. We waited at the school yard for the buses the UNRWA said they would come to drive us." "At 4:30 P.M. the Israeli war planes preceded the buses, and began firing missiles on the place. Suddenly, I was surrounded by a pool of blood, and a family was lying on the ground and their bodies shredded all over the place," Aisha added with strangled words.

This scene still hurts Aisha very much to the point that she has nightmares about it. At the time it occurred, she cried hysterically. She tells us, "I heard my sister Maram's voice, and then I knew that she was still alive. I went fast towards her and grabbed her hand strongly; I asked her not to leave me, and to stay by my side. Ambulances arrived and began to take us to the hospital.

In the hospital, Aisha learned that her mother, her stepmother, and three sisters have died, while her 23 year sister, Maram, was hit by shrapnel in different parts of her body. Additionally, her 14 year sister, Manar's leg was amputated, her 11 year, Ibrahim, was injured in the intestines and leg, her 13 year brother, Yousuf's leg was broken, and her 19 year brother, Mahmoud, has cuts in the veins. The child who had lost her dreams and innocence, says, "I tried to grasp what had happened, but my brain had stopped for what happened is far from humanity, and overrides the human mind."

Aisha, who is too young to have experienced such trauma says, "How ugly it is to be an orphan! My mother filled my life with love, affection, and care, but now I know what it means to live alone in this life without a mother to pamper me with care and safety. From now on, I can no longer have a kiss on my forehead; I no longer have someone to comb my hair, and prepare me breakfast, or someone to wipe my tears. The Israeli aggression on Gaza stole away my childhood and warmth of family; it put me in the depth of the pain."

Their Souls Have Hugged During Prayers

Peace-loving, tranquil Al Batsh family lives in Al Tofah Neighborhood to the East of Gaza city together with other relatives with whom they share a strong bond of intimacy and affection. It happened to be the Holy Month of Ramadan, the time of the year when the family members pray together in a more than amazing, comforting scene. This year, thought, instead of the peace that used to surround them, devastation and death brought them closer.

We met up with Sabren Al Batsh, 56 year old woman. Her wrinkled face seemed very old burdened with sorrow, and despair. She is a mother who lost most of her family members following a barbaric massacre committed by the Israelis. Sabren says, "We were all waiting for the announcement of the surprise that the resistance promised to air on TV. Our men were praying at home; they could not pray at the mosque, for the Israeli air crafts did not stop hovering in the Gaza sky, targeting any moving object every now and then."

Sabreen, known as Um Osama adds, "I had lots of disturbing feeling prior to the attack, but I tried to stay calm and I went on with my prayers; I believed I could find peace in praying to God. Suddenly, the shelling started and I felt like something pulling me out of the room."

Around 10:00 o'clock, Saturday 12th, 2014. A massive explosion was heard across the neighborhood; it was stronger than earthquakes. Seconds later, electricity went off. We didn't feel or see anything except that were choking; dust was all over the house, smelling of death. All we wanted to know was what was destroyed and who was dead."

Sadly she says, "Hours later, ambulances arrived to take the wounded and the dead to the hospital; there were 18 martyrs: 25 year old Majed, my brother in law, his wife Amal who is 52 year old, 28 year old Baha'a, 26 year Jalal, 24 year Mahmoud, 21 year old Khaled, 25 year old Marwa, 18 year Ibraheem, 13 year old Manar, 20 year old Samah, who was six months pregnant, one and a half year old Amaal, 11 year old Anas, 14 year old Qusay, and 17 year old Essam. About 40 of our neighbors were wounded, in addition to 12 people of our family members. Some of their injuries were serious; others were slight. It was genocide.

Um Osama's heart aches over her eldest son, 30 year old Osama who had a severe injury in his feet, leading to amputating both legs. His eye was injured, too; several areas of his body were burned. Besides, he is now suffering from a hearing disability. Osama was thrown to a faraway place following the explosion. He was with his cousins killed at the massacre.

Um Osama dries her tears, and smiles, saying, "My sister, Aziza, died while she was reading the Holy Quran; the others died praying and supplicating. They will be martyrs God willing." She says that Um Baha'a was at the kitchen, preparing Qatayf, a Palestinian dessert, specially made during Ramadan. The Israelis launched their fatal, merciless rockets without further notice; they denied them the joy of what was left of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Um Osama herself was hit in the back. She says that her brother's in law house was levelled to earth as if there had never been no life in it. Windows of her own house were smashed.

Um Osama concludes, "Wounds and scars of body can heal, but not those of a soul. The scene of shelling, martyrs, devastation, and panic, and fear over my family would never go away."

Needless to mention that the International Humanitarian Law seeks to limit the effects of armed conflicts by protecting people who are not participating in hostilities. It is designed to balance humanitarian concerns and military necessity by limiting its destructive effect and mitigating human suffering.

Al Selik Family... Occupation Kills Six of their Children on the Swing

Until this moment, the 37 year mother Tahrir Al Selik cannot grasp the idea that playing time during a humanitarian truce in the "Protective Edge" aggression would make her children an easy prey for the missiles of the Israeli forces.

On Wednesday July 30th, the grandfather, Abdel Kareem, realized the extent of pain his grandchildren were feeling owing to the brutality of the aggression. He reassured both of Ola, Layan, Lina, Omneya, Abdel Halim, and Abdel Aziz that it is possible for them to play on the swings on the roof of the house. Tahrir, who lives with her husband and his family in the same house at Al Shujayia area, has lived all great deals of pain during this aggression. When the electricity was on, she and her family were keen to follow the news moment by moment on television as well as radio stations, hoping to hear the news of a cease fire.

Tahrir says, "I did not imagine that what we see on TV would be a reality, and would happen to me. That day, Al Fitr Eid; a humanitarian truce for 4 hours was announced. So, my father-in-law decided to take his grandchildren to the last floor of the house where many toys and swings are available in order to entertain them."

As soon as Abdel Kareem Al Selik, the grandfather, took his grandchildren to the roof, and started encouraging them to play, the Israeli F16 war planes took them by surprise, turning the fun activity into a bloodbath. Tahrir says, "It was 5:00 in the afternoon when we heard the explosion, and felt the rocks, dirt, and dust falling, as well as the glass of the windows breaking on top of our heads."

Tahrir, her husband, and her brother-in-law rushed to the place, and before they could realize the crimes resulting from the first missile, which took the lives of the grandfather, and the grandchildren Ola, Layan, Lina, Omneya, Abdel Halim, and Abdel Aziz, the occupation forces fired another missile at the same location. Consequently, Tahrir's brother-in-law was martyred. Tahrir says, "I found my father-in-law lying on his face; he was dead. I looked around, and found my two daughters, Ola and Malak, in each other's arms of extreme fear. Ola was headless, but Malak was still alive."

Due to the magnitude of the trauma, Tahrir could not move, and so lost consciousness amidst the martyrs and injured. As if the crimes the occupation forces had committed were not enough, they launched the third missile when the ambulance arrived to save Al Selik family, injuring Tahrir's daughter, and her brothers-in-law, as well as killing a number of paramedics and journalists present at the place.

Tahrir says, "Ambulances took the injured as well as the remains of the martyrs to Al Shifa Hospital, and I could not go with them due to the hazardous security situation in the region. We were all afraid for we did not know our fate, and whether the bombing will resume killing those who had survived of us."

Tahrir tries to talk about her feelings, but her heart was broken. She says, "I never expect that my daughters will die this way and at this age. I bought them Eid Al-Fitr clothes before the beginning of Ramadan so that I do not have to go to the market in the few days prior to Eid. On the first day of feast I asked my daughters to wear their new clothes, but they refused to do so, and they asked me to keep them in the wardrobe to wear in Eid Al-Adha."

Tahrir brought a photo album of her daughters Ola and Malak; she started talking about each photo in details. Each photo held memories that increased the mother's pain and woe. The pictures got soaked with her tears, and her longing to hug her daughters; nothing is left for her but memories and images.

Um Ahmed AL Najjar, Few hours Separating the Deaths of her Father and her Children Rawan and Ahmed

In a street only hundreds of meters away from the borderline with the Israeli occupation in Khuza'a town lives Um Ahmed al-Najjar in her house; the house which was partially destroyed by the artillery shells of "Protective Edge" offense. This mother returned to her house, but without her children, Rawan and Ahmed, who were displaced with her, and were martyred at the shelter.

Um Ahmed says, "We were forcibly displaced; we left in search for safety, but we found ourselves surrounded by danger in a house that we thought would be safe."

She sometimes falls into silence, and then follows up intermittently, saying, "Rawan is gone. She is in the company of her beloved Ahmed. They survived death in Khuzaa, yet death followed them in Bani Suhaila. We have taken shelter in our own house since the beginning of this aggression. We have withstood here for 10 consecutive days under continuous shelling and death; we did not expect to survive until we were able to leave the house."

On Friday afternoon, the Israeli forces executed Um Ahmed's father, Haj Mohammed Tawfeiq Qudaih. She grieved and cried for her father's death. Yet, her children, Rawan and Ahmed, comforted her, and said literally, 'He is a martyr, Mom; why do you cry? How lucky my grandfather is!'" She did not know then that those offering her comfort after her father's death would follow him hours later in a horrible massacre.

The stricken mother talks about the deaths of her father and two children, saying, "Rawan was my soul, and Ahmed was another part of my soul. They were both with their aunt in the same building we took shelter at from the shelling.

They targeted us without mercy, and without warning; the house was packed with displaced people in addition to its owners; we were distributed within three floors."

It was around 3:00 A.M. on July 26th, 2014 when the three floor house was bombed over the heads

of its residents. That house which sheltered and welcomed the displaced relatives from Khuza'a in Khan Younis.

Despite the tragedy and pain that prevailed on her sad face, she resumes, "The house was bombed from the eastern direction, Ahmed and his sister were in the apartment opposite to where the rest of my family and I were. We did not believe what had happened; they pulled us out in the middle of the night. No one was able to grasp what was happening before our eyes."

After the raid, Um Ahmed's husband, Khalid, identified the location of his children, Ahmed and Rawan, and started calling their names out. Ahmed replied with fragile voice, 'Here I am father'. He called his son again, yet he did not respond. As for Rawan, she did not respond at all; how could she respond when she was 10 meters underground. Rawan and her aunt Ghalia were the last martyrs to be pulled out from under the rubble.

The mishap of Al Najjar family can only be described as a massacre; a massacre that killed their women and children. Ahmed, Rawan, their aunt Ghalia, her husband, and their children, in addition to her uncle, his wife, and his son were all martyred.

Um Ahmed says, "I never imagined that the Israeli deceitfulness would reach this extent; the place was packed, and we distributed ourselves on a number of houses owing to the huge number of displaced persons."

Medical crews recovered 26 corpses, mostly died in that house, which will be noted in history like dozens of other houses that were destroyed, and were witnesses to the bloodshed of those taking refuge inside them.

Rawan and Ahmed were not the only martyrs of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip. In fact, Al Najjar family has lost more than 80 martyrs during 2014, from Khuza'a in Khan Younis to the South of Gaza.

Enaam, Palestinian, Escaped with her Son from Syria to Lose him in Protective Edge Offense

Palestinians of Syria who thought they had fled to safety outside of Syria could not flee death in the Protective Edge offense which broke out on July 7th, 2014.

One of the martyrs of the aggression is the young man Abdullah Abu Shabab. He died during his work as a volunteer with the paramedics who went to rescue victims of bombardment on Al Shujayia. When the 40 year old mother, Enaam, started talking about the murder of her little son, she chose to begin with her tragedy while fleeing from Syria. She says, "We miraculously survived the bombing that targeted our house in Deraa Camp in Syria. Thus, we decided to head to Gaza as soon as we could finish the necessary procedures and coordination."

Enaam fled with her family, consisting of her husband, three daughters, and two sons. They were forced to flee to Gaza illegally through the tunnels as they had no passports.

The family lived a few months in Gaza trying to cope with the new situation; nevertheless, on July 7th, the situation had changed more with the outbreak of the Protective Edge assault.

Abdullah's sister, Hiba, says: "We were forced to evacuate our house in Al Shujayia Neighborhood on the day of the massacre which did not distinguish between a man or women, and a child or an elderly; everyone was a target; all within the range of rockets and missiles."

Enaam, who is pretending to be strong in an attempt to hide her weakness and tears, goes on, saying, "My three daughters and I went to a relative's house in Al Nasr neighborhood, where there was no room for my husband and two sons. Therefore, they went to a school west of Gaza and they come to us from time to time in order to check on us."

Enaam quickly wipes her tears and says, "We left Al Shujayia area to escape death. At that time Abdullah was restless for he wanted to return back with the ambulances in order to rescue the residents of Al Shujayia, yet his father refused."

On the 42nd day of the offense, Abdullah disappeared from the School where his father and brother were taking shelter; they called him over and over, but there was no answer.

They kept calling him till the next morning when someone answered Abdullah's phone, saying, "The owner of this phone was martyred while rescuing the wounded in front of Al Shujayia open market opposite Al Shujayia crossroad."

Everyone knew that Israeli forces had committed the second Shujayia massacre in front of the open market, resulting in more than 15 deaths and dozens of injuries. Hence, the father and brother rushed to Al Shifa hospital. Nonetheless, they told the mother and sisters that Abdullah was injured, and was receiving treatment at the hospital.

When the mother went to the surgery department, her elder son, Mohammed, had to tell her about his brother's death. He told her, "This is fate. Abdullah went to heaven, He went to Allah!" According to his sister, Hiba, the mother said with a shacking voice: "Abdullah is gone, the house is gone. Sufficient for us is Allah, and He is the best disposer of affairs."

Protective Edge Assault Takes Away Islam's Joy More than Once

As the 20-year-girl, Islam Salem Deib, was taking care of the details of her wedding, she was startled by the brutal Protective Edge assault that devastated her dreams. First, she was forcibly displaced from her family's house after it was hit by an Israeli missile. Second, her brothers were injured. And last but not least, her marital house, which she was supposed to move into last July, was destroyed.

Islam's story begins with the early moments of this aggression, saying, "I was in my room with my siblings, then we heard screams coming from our neighbors' house, calling everyone to evacuate their houses after the Israeli forces had asked them to evacuate their house. They gave the neighbors a few minutes before bombing the house."

Meanwhile, Islam waited with her family in their house thinking that they were not be affected by the bombing of the neighbors' house. Islam says, "We waited in my room till the war planes would stop raiding our neighbors' house; we chose my room for fear of being injured by shrapnel; my room was the safest and farthest place from their house."

Islam resumes, "The neighbors' house was hit by two reconnaissance rockets; the sound was so horrible that it was deafening. We realized then that one of the rockets hit our house. Although it did not explode, it caused massive damages, as it destroyed the guest room and burnt the furniture."

At that point, Deib family, whose members were overwhelmed by fear and panic, evacuated their house; they tried to reach the nearest safe place.

Islam continues, "We took shelter at my grandfather's house. After one day, weird symptoms began to appear on my three brothers; symptoms of pain that we have never seen before. Their color turned to orange, and they kept throwing up."

The three brothers were rushed to Kamal Edwan hospital for treatment, and then they were transferred to Al Shifa hospital. Palestinian and even the foreign doctors, who were present at Al shifa hospital by coincidence, have never seen symptoms such as those that appeared on the children of Deib family.

As Islam was keeping an eye on her brothers' health situation, she was also shocked when she knew that the Israeli forces had demolished her marital house, where she was supposed to move in in June.

Within a few seconds, the Israeli war machinery destroyed Islam's dreams; they targeted her fiancé's house in Beit Hannoun, North of Gaza, destroying all floors including her apartment which she had meticulously furnished with her fiancé Salem.

Islam, who insisted on going to check the ruins of her house, says, "My wedding was supposed to be in June, but first it was postponed to the beginning of August owing to the death of my fiancé's relative, then the destruction of my house delayed my wedding indefinitely."

She concludes, "I can never forget what had happened, the destruction of my house stole away my joy, my smile, and everything that makes me happy."

Al Khansa "Um Husam", Count my Martyrs on your Hands

On the 12th day of assault, the old woman, Um Husam Abu Jarad, bid farewell to four of her sons, one of their wives, and three grandchildren. Only a photo of them remained in front of her eyes, instead of their torn bodies owing to the targeting of their middle son's room, Abdulrahman, without prior warning.

This woman of Izbet Beit Hannon, South of Gaza tells her story with eyes full of tears, she said, "That day, I felt weird in the morning. During the day, my children showered me with requests; the thing that was unusual for them."

She started remembering and said in a pained voice, "Count on your hands, I lost my daughters, Samar, 14 years, Ahlam, 16 years, Naem, 22 years, Abdulrahman, 32 years, his wife Rajaa, their two children, Haneya, 2 years, and Mousa, 8 months. Tell me what have my children, my neighbors, and my people done? What have Mousa held within his white blanket? Where is the justice for our blood that is shed with ugliest ways?

On July 18th, 2014, one hour or more after the family had gathered around the dining table in Ramadan, the first artillery shell was launched at Abdulrahman's bedroom; walls, doors, and windows collapsed on top of the people inside the room.

Before being carried away in shreds they were drinking cups of tea. At the time, their mother was sitting in a balcony watching the view, and listening to the voices. But, then, she became hysteric, and started screaming, 'My children are gone, my children, my children!' A few seconds before she could reach them, another shell was dropped at the same place and destroyed growlingly and mightily.

Screams Increased; smoke columns and landslides heightened; adults broke down before the young; mothers carried unarmed children off their mattress; shells were dropped from all

directions, once from warplanes, and once from full tracked vehicles stationed on the borders.

Ambulances arrived and the place was overcrowded; a third shell was launched, but, praise to God, it did not explode. Paramedics began recovering the bodies of the dead people from under the rubble with the help of some neighbors. They were able to recover seven bodies, and two injured people who were still alive. The baby Mousa remained missing for hours.

Around 2:00 A.M. Mousa's aunt headed towards the rubbles, where the smell of sulfur and gunpowder reeked the place, searching for him. She was hoping to find him, to take him back to his 10-year-sister Weam, and his 7-year-brother Mohammed in order to resume his life with them fatherless as well as motherless.

Aunt Um Mohammed said, "I was searching everything, holding heavy stones, crying and calling out, 'Mousa! Mousa! Where are you?'

I found his bed empty of everything; no mattress, no cover, and no pillow to the point that I felt that biggest part of it was the same size of my palm.

I opened the carpet that was rolled twice or more searching for him, hoping that perhaps he had survived with his cousins who were miraculously fortunate to survive when they flew out of the room on top of their red carpet."

The news of his death interrupted her search for he had arrived from the hospital.

The rubble of the room where they died remains an indescribable obsession for Um Husam.

She did not enter that place since the occurrence of that crime which burned her heart, unlike her daughter Neama who was injured on that day. Neama would rush into the place whenever she felt longingly toward the martyrs of that day searching for their smell. She comforts herself with some pieces of the last cups of tea.

Al Shiekh Khalil Family, the Cruellest Scene of Al Shijaea Massacre

One of the most painful experiences of Al Shujayia massacre that was recorded during Protective Edge offense on July 20th, 2014 was committed against Al Shiekh Khalil family.

Photos of this family, that lost more than 7 of its members, were the first to be published by the media for the victims of Al Shujayia. The photos reflect a cruel scene for civilians trying to find shelter under the staircase.

The 15-year-survival, Sarah, tells the story of Al Shiekh Khalil massacre. She says: "At Sohur time, we heard people screaming. The shelling had intensified, and people had started to forcibly evacuate out of fear of the Israeli occupation shells that were hitting everything." Sarah continues, "Before we could decide to evacuate like the others, an artillery shell penetrated our house."

As the bombardment stopped, voices of the wounded and their families started to rise. The 11-year-brother Ziad, screamed, "I am injured; help me, my leg is bleeding." His father rushed to save him; he tied his leg with his shirt as first aids for he had expected the ambulance's inability to reach his house owing to the intensity of the shelling.

Sarah says, "At that time, I saw my 13-year-sister Hiba lying on the ground; she was beside me clinging to me; I tried to wake her up, yet, she refused, she was neither moving nor talking; I thought then that she was martyred; I got closer to her, and then I heard her breath. My father and I then discovered that Ziad had been hit injured in the head by shrapnel, and that he was bleeding."

In the meantime, Zainab, 18 years, rushed to the street searching for an ambulance. Everyone was waiting for her to return with the ambulance in order to recover the injured people, as well as to attend the others who were shocked.

The girl screamed loudly, "Help my family! They are all wounded. Help them! They are about to die." No one responded; everyone was rapidly escaping under hails of shells that targeted everything moving.

Meanwhile, Sarah's father managed to recover his wounded children; he put them in a van carrying a lot of wounded and martyrs. He heard his daughter Zainab screaming; he got out of the van despite of his injuries, and took her with him to Al Shifa hospital.

Sarah says, "As I arrived to the hospital, Zainab pointed out to the bed where Hiba was lying; her body was so cold and covered with a light sheet. I lift the sheet, touched her face, and raised my hands quickly. Hiba's death was my first shock within the family."

Sarah lost her pregnant mother, her sister Hiba, her 3-year-sister Samia, her uncle and his wife, her aunt, and her step-grandmother. She was injured, so did her brother Zeiad, her sisters Fatma and Maha, her father, her grandfather, and her aunts.

Sarah added, "I thought that my 7-year-sister Maha survived the massacre and was not injured, yet my father came and asked us to pray for her because shrapnel had penetrated her neck and backbone, and she became quadriplegic."

The details of that painful night are carved in that girl's memory; she cannot forget what had happened to her and her family. She even has nightmares about the massacre. Her wounds as well as pains have not healed yet.

Rajaa.... a Bride and a Joy That Did Not Happen

She is flipping the pages of her wedding photo album, remembering those beautiful moments she had spent with her husband, Mahmoud. They were very few days; days that could not even mark their honeymoon. She suddenly stops, smiles at one of the photos, and tells me about the happy moments behind that photo; moments which went so fast unlike the moments of sadness and separation that do not leave us.

Rajaa Abu Shamalah is a bride whose joy was taken away from her by the Israeli aggression; she was denied the joy that each girl waits for. She did not know what fate had hidden for her, and that life is not always a white dress. She did not expect to be wearing black that soon. That morning, Rajaa woke up, terrified, on heavy sounds pounding on the house, declaring the need to evacuate it for the drones intended to target one of the neighboring houses.

After going through a dark and horrifying night during which she did not sleep or rest, Rajaa did not know what to do except to put on her praying clothes, and leave immediately with her husband along with the other residents of Ijdedah Area of Al Shujayia, East of Gaza.

After a few hours, Rajaa's husband called her mother so as to let Rajaa stay with her, hoping she would be farther from the bombardment and danger. Rajaa did not know that would be the last time she would see him.

Rajaa, who is in her twenties, says, "Israeli artillery armament intensified the launching of random artillery shells in all directions; they hit a huge number of the neighborhood houses around my family's house, East of Al Nakhel Area where a lot of families members sustained injuries; the thing that forced us to leave like everybody else in the area. So, I was displaced once again."

Rajaa adds as her face shows signs of pain and dismay, "On Sunday 20th July, 2014, at around 6:00 in the morning, all residents of the area had to leave their houses, and so did we. We did not know where to go. Then, my brother decided that we should go to my aunt's house at the Beach Camp, West of Gaza. Meanwhile, my husband, Mahmoud, took refuge at Al Salam Tower, in the middle of Gaza along with his three sisters, Taghreed, her husband, and their five children believing that they would be in a safer and quieter place; Taghreed and her family had resorted to her family's house so as to escape Bait Lahia, North of Gaza."

Rajaa starts recalling the events of that gloomy day, adding, "I did not know that the events would turn our joy to sadness; June 21st was a great day for, despite the

fear, the bombardment, and the destruction, we tried to enjoy that day especially after the capture of the Israeli soldier, Shaul. After Iftar – that day was the 23rd of Ramadan – my mother told me the news about bombing Al Israa Tower, as broadcasted on a satellite channel."

Tears start pouring down heavily from her green eyes, as she carries on, saying, "I could not help but to get scared and worried, and I started to obsess. I quickly grabbed my cellphone to call Mahmoud, but there was no answer which increased my fears. I tried calling over and over but to no avail. I could not wait any longer, so I got dressed so as to head to the place. I called one more time for, perhaps, he would answer. Moments later, a manly voice replied, so I shouted yearningly, and I admonished him with love, 'Mahmoud, thank God you are safe. Where have you been? Why did not you answer earlier?' It turned out to be a man from the fire department, and he had told me Mahmoud was martyred. They had found his cell phone chip beside his body down the Tower."

She stops talking for a while in an attempt to hide her grief, pointing out that she had aspirations as well as plans for the future. However, fate has prevented those from happening, and that the Israeli offense has destroyed her dreams and aspirations.

Rajaa says, "My husband, Mahmoud Derbass, along with his three sisters, Aida, Sura, and Inas, as well as Taghreed, her husband, Engineer Ibrahim Al Kilani, and their five children were killed in cold blood. The childhood innocence and dreams of these children were both mercilessly and pitilessly murdered; most of their bodies were separated and scattered in pieces in scenes that bring tears. Eleven people were killed without any prior warning, none of whom was carrying a lethal weapon that would bring destruction upon Israel to have rockets launched at them and end their lives. All I can say is 'Allah is sufficient for me and He is the best disposer of affairs'."

After a few moments of silence, Rajaa says, "It never crossed my mind that Mahmoud would depart this life, and leave me so soon, although he had recently been uttering words about farewell. He used to tell me that even if we parted, he would always love me, and remain faithful to me, and that he would see me in Paradise."

Rajaa explained that separation is very harsh and even more painful for she was building the house where she and Mahmoud were to start a family, and begin a new life together; a life full of plans and hopes. Now, on the other hand, she is thinking whether her pain would heal or not!!!

Two Cracked Walls and a Sewing Machine

I went into a small alley, heading towards a tent that was set up next to “only” two cracked walls that were about to fall down at any moment owing to the intense bombing that had taken place here. These walls are all what was left of a house that was a home for 11 people before July 21st, 2014; it was a home for Um Emad’s family of Al Shaaf area.

Um Emad Al Mobaid, a woman in her sixties, is sitting in the center of this tent, kneading dough. Drops of sweat are cluttering on her forehead which is highlighted with ruddiness owing to the efforts she is exerting into making pastries for her children’s lunch.

Um Emad received me with a broad smile on her face. She starts telling what had happened to her family on that day which she describes as the “black ominous” Sunday.

She says, “It was 6:00 in the morning when the bombing intensified from all directions, and we did not have any options but to leave the house; we were forced to go to any other place even if it were the sea.”

Um Emad adds, “My family and I left the house without taking any of our personal belongings; that is after my son had watched the street. We did not know where to go. We saw the crowds and groups of people walking behind us as if they were wandering in marches with no knowledge of their destination.”

Every now and then Um Emad would work on her pastries.

She carries on, saying, “We headed to one of the UNRWA schools, but only stayed there two hours for it was too crowded. Thus, we decided to take refuge at the Greek Orthodox Church, in the middle of the city. We stayed for three days only as we were haunted by the Israeli rockets when the neighboring cemetery was bombed. Therefore, we fled after it became completely dark due to the power cut.”

With confused gazes, she resumes, “We decided to seek shelter at the house of our son’s friend that was already swarming with displaced people at that time, yet, it was, despite of its small area, better than the schools or the church. I used to sleep in a tiny room with my husband, three daughters, and two sons. I used to wash and cook the food as well as do all our other chores in that same room.”

She mentions that after the last truce, the house owner wanted his house back, so family had no choice but to return to their house. They were awfully shocked, as her husband could not recognize their house as a result of the vast amount of rubble that even closed the road leading to the house. After great effort, he managed to find the house; however, he was shocked for he could not believe that the house was entirely destroyed by the Israeli missiles.

Um Emad looks at her sewing machine which had been the family’s source of income for more than 40 years, and touches its remains as well as its electric generator by her fingers. She is determined to repair it so as to resume her work and favorite gift which she had had since her early childhood back in elementary school.

They used to have a garden around the house planted with all types of vegetables, fruit, in addition to olive trees. In one moment, it all became a pile of rubble and pebbles.

She says, “After the ceasefire, my son insisted on cultivating the small land remaining around the house again with some vegetables for he likes gardening.”

“I never expected for our house to be bombed like this, and end up unrecognizable. Nothing was left; no furniture, no electric devises, and no clothes; nothing expect my personal bag which I tried so hard to figure where I could find it. I told my son to dig even under the tree as well as

under the rubble. He found it intact, including all the official documents although its edges were burned. I thanked God for that.”

She carries on delightfully, “We have to sleep in this place despite of the gravity owing to its dilapidated walls that have no pillars supporting them.”

With a look of hope, Um Emad says, “My husband and I sleep in a small humble room in a “block” laboratory that belongs to a relative, male family members sleep in the tent, while my daughters sleep in an UNRWA school.”

Um Emad is looking for a three-room house to rent to accommodate her scattered family, and protect their privacy, particularly since winter is almost here, and the tent has failed to protect them from winter storms and rain.

Al Mobaid recalls the last assaults in 2008 and 2012 which, according to her, were less dangerous compared to the last assault that destroyed everything. She points out that it never occurred to her that she would be fleeing her house for she used to go to the garden to pick hibiscus disregarding the air raids. She would give the largess of her garden to the neighbors. Nevertheless, this recent assault forced her to leave her house for had they stayed, they would have been buried under its rubble.

Um Emad suffers from harsh psychological conditions owing to her husband’s excessive violence towards her; he creates problems for the slightest reasons, and blames her and her children for the bombardment and destruction of the house in every passing second.

She concludes, “I want neither food nor drinks. I do not want food coupons. I just want to restore our house so it would shelter us and preserve our dignity, and so I could go back to my sewing which runs into my veins, since I could never leave the needles, strings, and the scissors. I take them in my bag everywhere I go. They are my weapons.”



Nesma Al Ghoul..... Blindly I walked, Seeking Survival

"I do not know how I managed to walk; I do not know whether there were dead bodies on the ground or not. I grabbed my mother's hand, and hurried away, as if God has given me back the gift of sight. At 10:00 in the morning we arrived at my grandfather's house in Al Shujayia Neighborhood where the bombardment and danger followed us. Therefore, I left the house in my praying clothes accompanied by eighteen members of my family, including my sister who is visually impaired, like me. We heard people mutter and whisper; we did not know where we were going. I wished I had not been blind so as not to need anyone's assistance. It was as if we were on Judgment Day – every man for himself. I went on walking until we reached Al Daraj School."

Nesma Al Ghoul, a girl with a disability, describes her journey of suffering which started at the extremely packed UNRWA shelter; she was able to feel the crowdedness of the place from the noises people were making. She realized, then, that it was unfit to house them.

She says with a pained and anguished voice, "We were hardly able to resume walking until we reached another UNRWA shelter at the end of Palestine Street. Yet it was not suitable for us especially in regards to the facilities and bathrooms, since I need someone to escort me for my ablution or minimum daily life requirements, not to mention the lack of privacy there."

Nesam and her family had no choice but to resort to her father's friend's laboratory which they took as a shelter for the eighteen member family. She says, "We had to spend two days with no beds or pillows in that lab room and tiny hall. It was very difficult for me but it was still better than the shelter."

"Two days later, benefactors gave us mattresses, pillows, and some daily necessities. We suffered due to the lack of water; it was so scarcer that it did not meet our needs. Nevertheless, we were at least able to perform our acts of worship easily."

Agonized, she resumes, "After the assault and the journey of diaspora had ended, I returned to my house, trying to remember its features, and going through my personal belongings via a previously drawn mental map that has changed. The destruction affected everything related to the most vital life necessities for

me, namely my Braille typewriter that helps me write, as well as my voice-activated computer. Everything was destroyed due to the indiscriminate shelling that changed my life to a new kind of diaspora."

She continues with discontent, "The second and third floors where my brothers lived were destroyed; in addition, our house on the ground floor was seriously damaged. My social life has stopped; I was mentally devastated after I had lost everything related to my Master thesis that I was intending to finish this semester. I was keeping a copy on my computer. God Forbid, I was going to lose my mind if it were not for my supervisor who saved all the details of the thesis." She goes on, saying, "This chapter of suffering will haunt me in the future especially with regards to the road leading to my house after the destruction of buildings. Since my road map has changed, I am no longer aware of any barrier or wall that I might be bumping into as I am walking owing to the mass destruction."

"I spend most of my time at university to finish my thesis since life necessities are no longer available. Furthermore, I have become unable to meet the required needs especially in light of my dire financial situation preventing me from buying a computer that suits my disability. Not to mention the inability to borrow a computer from the university."

She carries on, saying in woe, "I am trying currently to rebuild my life, and to start from scratch for the last aggression has taken us 120 years backwards. As for the international organizations that offer aid, we only hear about them in the media. The needs of the people with disabilities are not cans of chick-peas or beans; rather, we need compensation for the lost part of our lives."

Nesma's maximum ambition is the restoration of the streets in order for her to be able to move as smoothly and easily as before, and that the needs of the persons with disabilities, such as the sign language for the deaf and mute, are put into consideration by those in charge of the reconstruction.

Nesma, the young girl in her twenties, works as a coordinator at the Center of Assistive Technology for the people with disabilities at the Islamic University as well as a trainer in disability issues.

The Night Al Wafa Hospital Was Destroyed; Nisreen Was Displaced On Her Wheelchair

When "Protective Edge" assault was launched, Nisreen Hussein, 35 years, was being hospitalized at Al Wafa hospital in Al Shujayia Neighborhood. Her difficult health condition requires both occupational and medical therapy in the hospital, as she suffers from cancer and spine functions failure.

On July 16th, Nisreen was displaced from this hospital under heavy bombardment from the Israeli military machinery; that day, Israeli forces forced everyone in the hospital to evacuate in order to destroy the hospital entirely.

Indeed, the hospital was destroyed after the patients and medical crews had evacuated, in clear violation of the International Law which prohibits attacks on health institutions or health care centers. As if this was not enough, Israeli machinery also destroyed specialized medical devices inside the hospital, and did not allow anyone to take them out.

Nisreen tells the details of her suffering during this aggression, saying that the close location of Al Wafa Hospital to the eastern border areas of Al Shujayia neighborhood, and the viciousness of the aggression which affected everything, created a state of extreme horror for her as well as everyone present at the hospital.

She says, "The shelling did not stop day or night; we could not sleep in those circumstances. Military vehicles were approaching the hospital quickly, and we were afraid of these vehicles more than the Israeli warplanes hovering in the sky."

Shelling increased with every passing day until on the morning of Wednesday July 16th Israeli forces targeted the fourth floor of the hospital with five artillery shells leading to significant damage.

Nisreen recalls those moments, saying, "Nurses of the hospital hassled to take all patients down to the ground floor; we were all put in the reception hall, which is at the middle of the hospital hoping that it would be the safest and most protective

location for all patients."

The situation remained as was full of fear and anticipation owing to the threat of bombing the hospital. For ten day, Israeli forces increased the warnings through international organizations, demanding the hospital to be evacuated, but the hospital administration insisted on not to evacuate because all the guests were patients.

On Thursday July 17th, the Israeli army contacted the hospital administration directly, and threatened that the hospital would be entirely destroyed, and they were granted a delay until Friday morning in order to evacuate.

Upon the intensification of strikes on the surrounding buildings, the evacuation of the whole area of residents, the power cut, and the spread of thick dust and darkness, the hospital administration had no choice but to respond to this threat, for fear of a massacre against the patients.

Nisreen explains, "We were transferred by an ambulance to Al Sahaba Medical Compound in Gaza... It was the cruelest and most terrifying night; we did not expect to arrive there safely, and all the way we were uttering the Shahadateen as well as reciting Quran verses."

Nisreen underwent very harsh moments, so did her family, especially her four children. After learning what had happened to his mother in the hospital, Muhannad, Nisreen's eldest son (9 years old), cried deeply, and was unable to talk to his mother when he heard her voice over the phone.

Even with the end of the aggression on Gaza Strip, Nisreen's hardship was far from over. Her suffering will continue as long as she cannot find the therapy she was receiving at Al Wafa hospital since it is not available in any other hospital in the Gaza Strip.

Nisreen concludes her meeting with us by saying, "I'm suffering from my deteriorating health condition, what can I do? I cannot find specialized devices for my therapy. "

Badeea Pulls Out Her Children's Clothes from The Ruins of Her House

In between the destroyed houses of Al Shujayia Neighborhood, a woman in her twenties was engaged in sewing a torn shirt for her son, Ahmed. This mother was very pleased to have succeeded in pulling the shirt from under the rubble of her house since she wants for Ahmed and his four brothers to feel warm in this cold weather of the autumn.

This woman, whose name is Badeea Hassanin, was surrounded by her five children, playing around her. She is one of the Palestinian women, who writhed once from the internal conflicts, and once from the Occupation forces; she had lost her first husband in the events of the Palestinian division in Gaza Strip in 2007, and then her second husband was mildly injured during the 'Protective Edge' Aggression that was staged on July 7th, 2014.

This energetic woman was talking to us and insisting on being hospitable towards us despite of her limited resources, namely a brazier, and an old teapot. As she started preparing the tea, she said, "I know the situation is dire, but being hospitable towards our guests is a duty."

The woman started recalling the hardship she had to undergo during the assault that ended after 51 days. She said, "Considering our past experience with the last Israeli aggression, we hid in a room we thought would be the safest in the house."

She resumed, "Just before the Shujayia massacre, and as the artillery shelling intensified, my brother called me, asking me to leave the house due to the escalation of events as well as the increased number of martyrs among civilians upon bombing their house without prior warning." Meanwhile, Badeea's children were so devastated due to everything happening around them; they were crying nonstop; they also suffered from involuntary urination. It only got worse with the succession of the Israeli random strikes; however, the final strike was when a neighboring house that belonged to the Antaiz family was targeted.

Badeea said, "Our house is only a few meters away from theirs. Thus, the bombing did not just

hit their house. The shells were pouring from all directions. I heard that four children of that family were martyred, and that the mother was injured; in addition, I heard the father screaming and yelling for help, and I saw the smoke rising from their house. Then, my husband, children, my husband's second wife, and I scurried out of the house at precisely 10:00 in the evening of July 19th."

Although these painful memories terrified Badeea, she overcame her agony, and went on, "We left under the buzzing planes that did not halt firing rockets on our area opposite Al Rayyes Mountain."

Badeea's suffering did not end here; as soon as she had arrived at her family's house, the bombardment intensified there as well. So, everybody was soon forcibly displaced, seeking a safer area than Al Shujayia Neighborhood.

The only choice at that time was to reach the closest UNRWA school. Badeea said, "Throughout that time, we remained homeless, until one day, during the truce, my husband decided to go back to our house to bring some clothes. He was struggling to bring as much as possible as quick as possible. Then, my cellphone started ringing, and when I answered, I could hear his voice yelling 'I am injured! Call the ambulance for God's sake! Hurry up! I am bleeding', and then I lost the connection."

Badeea was silenced by her sorrow, yet she tried to overcome her pain. She carried on, saying, "Six hours had passed, and I was still waiting for any news. Then, someone approached me whispering that my husband had been injured, and that he was being treated at the hospital at that moment. In the meantime, we lost our house in the same raid."

Badeea left her kids at the shelter, and went to the hospital to make sure that her husband was fine. He was in a coma, but was in a stable condition, according to the doctors. Those days were both slow and painful for Badeea and her family for she had to stay at the shelter with her children while her husband was recovering at the hospital pending the end of the assault.

Takween Tells the Horrors of Displacement During Al Shujayia Massacre

In a staircase that is no bigger than two meters square, Mrs. Takween, 16 years old, accompanied by her daughter, her husband, his parents, and his sister, took shelter from the shells of the Israeli aggression staged on Gaza Strip on July 7th, 2014.

They were trapped in that place without water or power. Takween described those cruel moments, saying, "The idea of leaving the house was impossible for us, till the artillery shells launched by the Israeli armament stationed East of Al Shujayia Neighborhood targeted my apartment on the upper floor. Fortunately, I was sitting with my child on the ground floor with my mother and father in law and their daughter. Stones started dropping on our heads from my apartment as well as neighbors' houses."

She added, "The shelling was random, and did not distinguish between houses, streets, or empty lands. The bombing on that night was indescribable. Usually when war planes start shelling, they identify the target, but what happened that gloomy Sunday night was abnormal. Shells were fired everywhere, in front of us, behind us, and over our heads without warning, and without a reason justifying those violent strikes."

"We could not leave during the nonstop bombardment from all directions. Not to mention the power that was cut off from the neighborhood, and therefore we would only see fire here and there. Additionally, we were afraid of being targeted by Israeli war planes during our escape from death that was surrounding us at home and even the entire area," said Takween.

Takween stayed there with her family for more than seven hours. She was dejected the most for her little girl who was holding her strongly, and was terrified more than any other person.

She added, "We stayed in two meter space until the daylight, and then my father-in-law decided to trust in God and leave the house; he thought if we lived or died, this would be our fate."

We came out of feeder-roads, traumatized by the horror of what was happening in front of us and behind us. We saw the shells with our own eyes, screaming and running just like residents of the area who had to wait the daylight like us to get out."

Takween continued remembering these situations, saying: "I do not know how long it took us to reach the neighborhood outskirts. I do not know how many cries for help we heard from houses that were targeted in front of us, and we were unable to help them. I remember very well that someone was repeating, 'Run, and do not look back. Run, and go out of your houses. Do not wait to rescue anyone or else you will be injured beside them. You will not find any one to rescue you.' Indeed, this was what had happened."

"We resorted to Al Daraj School, East of the city, and stayed there till the aggression was over, and we never returned to our house even during the humanitarian truce. We did not trust the Israeli occupation, for civilians were their first and last targets during this aggression. We returned when a long-term truce was announced," added Takween.

Takween returned back to her house with her family one day after the cease-fire was announced on August 26th. They were shocked by what had happened to them without having committed any guilt. What had happened to them emphasizes the barbarianism and brutality of the occupation via targeting innocent civilians in their homes. Takween concluded her story by saying, "As my mother-in-law said words cannot describe what happened; If I try to speak about what I feel, words will fail me because it is already beyond describing."

Hassna Al Najjar...a Survival from a Massacre against People Carrying the White Flag

There, in a tent set on the rubbles of Martyr Hamdan Al Najjar, and on a dirty carpet, sixty year old Hassna is sitting with one of her neighbors. She miraculously survived a barbaric massacre in Khuzaa Town on the fifteenth day of the Protective Edge attack on Gaza Strip.

Hassna is still not fully recovered for she had witnessed her husband's death who was murdered in cold blood by an Israeli sniper while he was, together with his relatives, putting up the white flag.

Hassna says, "Artillery shells as well as gunshots from the Israeli soldiers who had invaded our town were being fired everywhere. The attack got more brutal on the 22nd of July.

Hassna says, "Death seemed very imminent. The third floor of our house was hit. As a result, we fled; it was around 11:00 in the morning. Bullets and bombs were coming towards us from all directions."

Khuzaa is relatively a small town compared to other ones in Gaza Strip, yet it witnessed the intentional murder of hundreds of innocent citizens. Hassna goes on, saying, "We lost focus, we ran towards the East instead of the West. We thought of nothing; we were merely running seeking safety. The kind of safety we could not find in our town for it was surrounded by Israeli soldiers from the East as well as West."

She adds, "While we were running for our lives, the Israeli soldier who was inside the tank showered the place with bombs. As we got closer, the soldiers spoke through the megaphones, commanding us to stop. They promised not to shoot at us; we were still carrying the white flag, surrendering."

She continues, "My husband, my kids, our relatives, and I were carrying the white flag to assure them that all we wanted was safety and nothing other than safety. Yet, we were seriously shocked to see the soldier targeting my husband, Hamdan, with a bullet in his head. Seconds later, a wave of bullets killed three of our relatives."

Hassna tries to pull herself together so as to tell us the rest of the story, "We started to crawl in order to pass the tanks until we got closer to Rafah; we miraculously survived. At that moment, I completely broke down. I could not but think of how my husband was murdered right in front of my eyes, and I could do nothing to him. Instead, I was forced to flee with the rest who were with me, leaving behind his dead body."

Hassna became a refugee at one of UNRWA school shelters in Rafah. She later moved to Bany Suhaila in Khan Younis. She was worried about the bodies of her husband and relatives. However, she knew later that paramedics were allowed to get them three days later. She also learned that her three-story house was turned into a pile of ashes.

Hassna refused the ideas of staying at the shelter; thus, she decided to set tents next to her destroyed house. She could not stand the suffering and agony she went through at the UNRWA shelter.

She points out, "We were forced to take shelter at the school; I was agonizing over my husband's death and my destroyed house. Nothing really matters now; I just need to take care of my children and grandchildren. They are all I have now. I still have no idea how we will go on with our lives and whether we can adapt or not. However, I know for sure that death will haunt us again for the Israelis would keep tracking us with no mercy. Israel is not held accounted for its crimes, and thus, will continue killing us."

Hassna concludes, "If an Israeli family had undergone the same sort of suffering we had, the whole world would have stood for them, and condemned what had happened. They denied us the right to live, and they will sure continue to do so because there is no justice in the world. Our lives would turn into living hell thanks to them."

Rami Khrewat... Received News about the Deaths of his Wife, Son, and Fetus in Few Seconds

On July 25th, 2014, Rami Khrewat woke up in panic at the voices of artillery shells hitting his house at Izbit Beit Hannun. He rushed out of his room to find his yard filled with smoke; he did not find but his two trembling children, Fadi, 6 years, and Adel, 4 years. He took them out of the house; handed them to their grandfather, and then returned to his bombed house searching for his 24 year wife, Suha, and his daughter, Mona, who is hardly 3 years old.

As he returned back he found his brother holding his daughter, heading towards the street, and screaming "Ambulance! Where is the ambulance?!" Rami turned to find his wife underneath a pile of stones. While trying to pull her out of the rubble, he realized that she had been hit by shrapnel all over her body.

He grabbed her hand and tried to pull her out of the rubble, but then he was shocked; he noticed that Suha has no more joined bones. She became a mass of flesh, and the bones that made up her body were smashed by the gush of stones.

Rami described those cruel moments, saying, "At that moment, I realized that she could not be rescued this way; she no longer has joined body like the rest of us. She no longer has bones in her legs to help her stand up when I pull her out of the rubble. My cousin arrived, and helped me. He pulled the curtains that were hanging in my house, and started helping me remove the ruins off my wife. We then carried her gently and laid her over the curtains."

Rami rushed to the street searching for an ambulance to drive them to the nearest hospital. Unfortunately, he did not find but a horse-drawn carriage; he carried his wife, who was barely breathing, and staring with her teary eyes. He put her on the cart, and headed towards the hospital.

All the way to the hospital, Rami was trying to stay hopeful. He was checking his wife hoping that she will survive an absolute death. He checked her pulse for a while, and he put his ear near her body for a while until he was reassured

that she was alive. For him, there was still hope, especially after an ambulance had stopped beside the cart to transfer his injured wife to the hospital.

As soon as they had arrived to the hospital, Rami received news about the death of his daughter Mona. After minutes of Mona's death a doctor came to tell him that his wife too had passed away, yet, her 7-month- fetus is still alive inside her womb, and that they would try to rescue him. Despite the pain, Rami was still hopeful that his long-awaited baby, Ahmed, would be the last beautiful memory that was made by him and Suha. During that tough time for the grieving father, doctors managed to pull out the fetus alive from the womb of his dead mother. Yet he had shrapnel in his tiny back and another one in his neck that had not started breathing in this world yet.

After 7 minutes, Ahmed left to heaven, bidding his father farewell, and escaping the smell of gunpowder mixed with blood and noise; he left like his mother and his sister, Mona, forever. The only things left for Rami were a lock of Suha's hair, a piece of her dress, and Mona's pink shoe. As for her child Adel, he was left with is a memory of an ambulance. He still rushes whenever he hears the ambulances' sirens, shouting "My mother is here...My mother is here."

The scene in Rami's house now is about a small eye-catching bloody shoe hanging over the rubble of the faraway house, which leaves an impression of what used to happen here; "I was here playing and running; my mother was there; my father was yelling at me to take care; I was their little pampered girl Mona. I was their red doll. I was their 2 year cupcake."

However, the situation is different in Gaza, before you know it, death visits you suddenly. Your land and your heaven are permissible for the Israeli occupation fire. The rockets fall on your head from all directions without prior appointment reaping the most precious things you have in this world.

Raneen Al Zaanein, Delivered her First baby the Day her Grandfather Died

Raneen Al Zaanein, 21 years, was deprived of delivering her baby "Ali" in safe circumstances similarly as any woman; she delivered her baby during the Protective Edge aggression after she was forcibly displaced. As she returned back from the hospital, she was shocked by the news of her grandfather's death.

Raneen lives at Beit Hanoun City, South of Gaza Strip; she says: "I lived a severe state of fear during the last aggression that I even felt like crazy whenever rockets or shells fell. Even though I witnessed the two former aggressions on Gaza, but the situation was different this time, perhaps because it was the first time to be far away from my family or because I was in the ninth month of my first pregnancy, and my due date was approaching at the beginning of this aggression."

Each day, Ranein would pray to God to delay her delivery until the aggression was over. At that time and with the intensification of bombardment and worsening situation in the city, her family, like all residents, was forced to evacuate their house.

Ranein points out, "I went to my father's house in Sabra neighborhood in the center of Gaza City. The cars had stopped working owing to the extreme state of fear that prevailed in the city. Hence, I had to move from the far North of the Strip to the center of Gaza City on a cart and donkey with my husband's family who moved at the beginning of the aggression to Beit Hanoun School.

After this family had lived five days at their in-laws' house, they received the news of the demolition of their house in Beit Hanoun through the local radio stations, exactly on July 28th. It was destroyed along with a number of houses that were completely destroyed.

This family endured their pain, and hoped that the aggression would end till August 1st, 2014, which was Raneen's due date. She says, "When I felt severe pain, I waited for the ambulance for too long. It came after several hours."

Raneen's mother could not apply the Palestinian customs in cases of birth. She was unable to accompany her daughter during her delivery as her house was overcrowded with displaced people, especially as she had to receive her sisters and their families. In addition, she gave shelter to those living at Shaafout area in Al Shujayia, East of Gaza City, which has been entirely wiped out during the aggression, bringing the number of arrivals to her small home to more than one hundred and twenty people.

Raneen delivered her baby, and returned to her parents' home. As she was going up the stairs, she was surprised to find the house had changed; everyone was shocked by the tragic news of the death of her grandfather in Al Shujayia Neighborhood during evacuation. Raneen went through a deep state of distress; she was not able to breastfeed her child. The new born baby "Ali" was crying out of hunger, as he spent those 6 hours after his birth without being breastfed. His grandmother, "Umm Hassan" prepared for him mint to drink.

Raneen says, "My husband approached me with our baby Ali between his arms, whispering to me, 'Our baby is hungry. Nurse him even a little so he could feel your tenderness.' As I held him, I felt a shiver over my body; I held him closer to my chest, hoping that the smell of his tiny head would overpower the bad smells that emitted from everywhere in the city because of the smoke and blood." She continues, "By evening, voices of the shelling and explosions increased; I put him on his small mattress under the bed and laid next to him, afraid that someone would step over him in the deep dark due to the absence of power and light. At that time, I only wished if he had remained inside of me for more days so as to be safer. "

Samaher is Robbed of her House and White Dress Days Before Her Wedding

Not far away from Gaza beach, particularly in Tal Al Haw neighborhood, a twenty one year old Samaher Mostafa who got engaged a year and a half earlier has been dreaming of moving to her beautiful, new, and small house after marriage. She pictured every moment of that life, waiting for the big day to come. Unfortunately, Protective Edge offense denied her that dream house; her white wedding dress was buried under the rubble, and her unused stuff was destroyed.

October 5th was supposed to be the best day with her fiancé; now all wishes are to be postponed. Samaher says, "I have been so worried and anxious throughout the offensive; I could not sleep day or night. Those were the hardest days of my life. Although I have witnessed the two previous assaults on Gaza in 2008 and 2012, this one is the fiercest attack ever. The fact that I have lost my house made it even more painful." She goes on, "Ever since Ahmed and I got engaged almost a year and a half ago, I have had lots of plans for my future, and plenty of dreams to fulfill. Alas, one cannot get all s/he desires. This is a test from God; this is my destiny, and I am satisfied despite of the pain and anguish." Samaher recalls her memories, explaining, "We started from scratch; we closely watched the house being built, and finished from A to Z. We chose our furniture so carefully; it is here where we are getting married, and spending our most wonderful days of our lives. So, we spent a great deal of time taking care of every single piece and space: the bed room, the living room, the kitchen, and the electrical devices. I chose the best of everything; I wanted everything to look exactly as I pictured it. Luckily, my fiancé was so understanding; he trusted me and always approved of what I said he never opposed me despite of the high prices of some items. He used to joke with me saying, 'We get married only once; lets enjoy every moment to the maximum!'"

Before the attack was staged, Samaher bought

her white dress. She placed it in the closet with the other bridal stuff she purchased in her house to be.

Every time she visited her house, she would have a look at that dress, and remember that day that is so longed for was to be on October 5th.

Samaher points out, "Like any other girl, I have been waiting impatiently for that day to come; I hoped that it would be a day to remember, and that it would make every family member happy. Yet, the unexpected happened. My fiancé called me and broke the devastating news_ our dream house was totally destroyed after an Israeli raid had hit it."

Samaher continues, "I could not believe what he was saying; I did not want to believe. I actually thought he was kidding, for that was always his habit. I remember he used to tease me, saying that he would be martyred. I asked him to stop joking about such topics, but, that time, he spoke in a serious tone, explaining, 'this is not a joke, Samaher, it is the truth; nothing is left. The whole house was demolished.'"

She comments in severe grieve, "I did not know what to do then. Should I console myself on my dream that had just been lost, or should I console my fiancé on losing their entire house? I wept so painfully; it was a shock for me. However, I quickly remembered that I had to thank God no matter what happened. So, I thanked God, feeling grateful that my fiancé and his family members had not been hurt."

When the attack was over, Samaher's fiancé tried to look for an apartment with a reasonable price to rent. He thought he could get the apartment ready before the wedding day. Even this was not possible; due to the high housing demand following the destruction of 19,000 houses in the Gaza Strip, rents have risen. And so, until the reconstruction begins, "We will have to postpone our wedding until further notice," says Samaher, lamenting.

Four Bombs Tore up Even Al Kafarna Family's Fetus

Having to take shelter at a bathroom for several days was one of the worst things that Ayeda Naser Al Kafarna was forced to do during Protective Edge assault. She thought it would be much safer there; however, things worsened beyond that, and on July 17th 2014, the course of her and her family's life has changed forever.

On that night, the Israeli forces dropped four bombs on Amal's house in Al Amal neighborhood near Bait Hanoon without any prior warning. Her husband, her sons, and she were hit.

Aml describes what happened that night, saying, "My husband and my sons were praying at the house. The first bomb fell on my husband's back while he was kneeling; my sons were injured by shrapnel. The second and third bombs targeted us, me and the rest of the kids while we were asleep. All of us were critically injured."

Um Mohammed is a mother of 14 sons and daughters, the eldest is 20 years old. Back then, she was still six months pregnant with her youngest baby who she delivered after she had been wounded.

Um Mohammed goes on, "The shower of bombs hit me directly, tearing part of my scalp, burning my legs, and disfiguring them. Shrapnel landed inside my tummy, reaching my fetus. Then, the walls of the room collapsed as my two little kids and I were sleeping. Mohammed came to check on us; he was bleeding already as a result of the shelling."

Paramedics managed with the help of the neighbors to get the family out of the rubble. She says, "All I remember about those harsh moments is when my kids and I started bleeding; we were rushed to Bait Hanoon hospital. However, because of my critical injury, I was referred to Al Shefaa hospital, in Gaza City; on the way, I passed out."

Um Mohammed woke up twelve days later; she put her hand on her tummy to check on the baby. Much to her surprise, there was no baby. She was alone at the hospital with no one there to inform her about the conditions of her husband and kids.

A doctor came into the room, carrying a very tiny baby. He told her that it was her ten days old baby, weighing only one kilo and 100 grams, and that he had spent the days of her coma in the Neonatal Intensive

Care Unit. He also told her that they could not keep him there any longer because there was not enough space in the NICU of the hospital.

Um Mohammed left Al Shefaa hospital in an ambulance to Bait Hanoon hospital for the second time after she had gotten better, and learned that her husband and kids had left the hospital and that they were ok. She was shocked to see them in a classroom at an UNRWA school, all injured.

The pained mother hugged her kids in pain, kissing their wounds, and listening to what they have to tell her. They talked and talked about what had occurred, reproaching her for leaving them alone. Her eighteen year old Ala'a uncovered her head to show her mom her wounded head which resulted in losing the hair in front of her head.

Also, Amal's heart ached over her ten year son, Kareem who did not run to hug her as she expected. Instead, he was lying there next to the wall, distressed. When she checked him, she found over 200 stiches all over his body, most of which on critical areas. Poor Kareem, he preferred that his mom would not see him like that, lest she could not recover.

Amal settled with her family at Al Shiekh Zayed School. Doctors told her that she had to stay in bed, and rest until her injuries heal, and she totally recovers. That was impossible, since the school she was at was packed with refugees. The classroom alone had more than one family. Most of them were wounded during bombardment; others were suffering due to transverse diseases.

Um Mohammed's family spent three days at Al Sheikh Zayed School. Then, they moved to Bait Hanoon School, for there was not enough room for them at the former school. Fortunately, the circumstances were a bit better than before owing to the announcement of the long term cease fire between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which allowed two of the families staying with them at the same school to go back to their partly destroyed houses.

Disturbed as she is, Um Mohammed weeps sometimes, and lulls her kids at other time, hoping that the best is yet to come.

Al Najjar Family.... Husbands Murdered During Displacement

In a house located in Khuzaa Town near the Eastern border area with Israel, Asmahan Al Najjar lives with her 15 member family. Her relatives who live at areas closer to the borders took refuge at this house. Her two daughters are among those who were displaced at her house after Israeli forces had killed their husbands as they were fleeing their house during the Protective Edge offense.

Asmahan said, "Our tragedy began when we were shelled by gas bombs; two of my daughters fainted, and we took them to the hospital. We stayed there until they woke up from the impact of the gas." Asmahan tried to talk, but her daughter Marwa interrupted her with a strong scream that drew the attention of everyone around her. She continued talking, "We did not expect that they would invade the town; nevertheless, they entered from the West, not the East, off the borders in front of our house. War planes and artillery armament surrounded us, and kept firing on us, I will never forget that night."

Voices of women and children pierced the air; all of them agreed that death was definite that night, and that those who escaped would see the most hideous through this aggression. Asmahan, whose voice had gradually faded after hearing her daughter talking, said, "We were surrounded at home, and we were 35 people. Any moving target in the street was a prey to the enemy that was eager to get us in the bloodbath so as to feel victorious."

Asmahan continues, "We went out surrendering when the Israeli army invaded the town; we raised white flags. Not only they gestured us that we could get out safely now, but they also spoke through loudspeakers. However, this was no more than a trick. I still wonder about the meaning of safety for them! A soldier aimed his automatic rifle towards my daughter's husband's neck, and shot him in cold blood. He, then, ordered us to go away immediately otherwise he would repeat it with others." Everyone jogged and quickly pulled my daughter Marwa, who had fainted from the magnitude of the tragedy. Israeli army continued its barbarism, and fired a missile at a house everyone was taking shelter beside. Thus, a wall fell over my other daughter's husband."

When words cannot describe what hurts the heart, the agony becomes apparent in the eyes that are already filled with sorrow and oppression. This is the case of the martyrs' wives and everyone who witnessed their murder such as their children.

Asmahan added, "We got out of the town at about 1:30 P.M. We scattered; each family went to a school we considered as safe and a bit distant from death, amid the suffering that threatened our lives for the lack of water, and safety because of the brutality of the Israeli occupation."

When a humanitarian truce was announced, and ambulance crews were allowed to recover the bodies of a group of martyrs some of which had hydrolyzed in the streets, Marwa got out bidding farewell to the martyrs.

She said, "As they announced the truce, and the end of the aggression, moments of death revisited my imagination; how would I cope with my life now? How will I return to my house on my own without him?"

She went on, "I started trembling, and went into the house that was partially destroyed. Our home was in a better condition compared to other houses. However, our pain is greater than to be described by words."

Wahdan Family... Shells Chased them in Three Shelters

Three brothers, the eldest is five years, and the youngest is a year and a half baby, were all wounded in the massacre during which their mother was killed, and their father's leg was amputated.

The infant Mohammed is suffering from a skull fracture in addition to an injury to the bladder and intestines. Omar, three years, his intestines were torn out by shrapnel, and so he needs to travel for treatment. Musab, five years, was excluded for the fact that he sustained light injury. Yet, like everyone else he is in pain. They want their "martyr" mother, and they ask about their wounded father who is now being treated in Egypt.

Three children are reciprocating the attention of their uncle's wife, who refused but to keep an eye on them after the death of their mother and the injury of their father in an Israeli bombing-without prior warning- that targeted the house where they took shelter in search for the lost safety on August 1st, 2014.

Hadeel, the uncle's wife tells the story, saying, "In the second week of the aggression, we were on the ground floor of my father-in-law's house, and then the shells began to downpour on us. At approximately twelve o'clock at night, bombardment directly targeted our house, injuring my brother-in-law, Bakr Wahdan, and three of his relatives."

Ambulances headed, as usual, to the targeted places with guidance from neighbors and local radio stations, according to Hadeel. Ambulances recovered the wounded, yet, all of them martyred after a few hours of the evacuation. The rest of the family was forced to go to Abu Hussein UNRWA School; the following day Gaza woke up to a new massacre committed at that school by the occupation forces at dawn on Wednesday, July 30th, 2014, which claimed the lives of 15 people and dozens of injuries. Wahdan family survived this raid, but was forced to flee for the second time, leaving the school which has become a threat to their lives. The new destination was the house of a relative in Jabalia Camp. However, Israeli forces did not grant Wahdan family a break to rest; Israeli war machinery chased them, and targeted their new shelter that consisted of four floors. The shelling resulted in a new massacre that killed eight people and wounded fourteen of the Wahdan family.

In the massacre, Samar, the mother of the three children (Omar, Musab, and Muhamad), was martyred. Hadeel cries for the three injured children and says, "How could these children understand what had happened to them and their parents? How do I explain to them the situation?! Our family has been stricken, and no one cares about us. We were forced to escape from death three times, yet, we were targeted and we are now displaced between wounded and psychologically shocked."

Hadeel says, "I took it upon myself to take care of them, and I will keep my promise for the spirit of their mother; I will take them with me to where I live until they recover. Although their wounds will continue to ravage their bodies because the missiles' shrapnel will not come out all at once, but will remain to take physical and psychological time."

Twelve martyrs and 14 wounded was the outcome of the massacre against Wahdan family in the North of Gaza Strip, including the mother of the three children; Omar, Musab, and Mohammed. They will remain among the hundreds of children who have been targeted directly and indirectly by an aggression that broke the hearts of the Gazans, and destroyed them over 51 days.

Abeer Wishes to Lose Her Legs to Get Back Her Wheel Chair

"My family members forgot all about me; they all got out and left me alone with my elderly father and very sick mother. For the first time in my life, I felt that I am a burden; I wished I had been dead."

With her tears going down her checks, those heartbreaking words were spoken by the 20 year old, paralyzed, Abeer Al Harkally. Her disability was an obstacle, hindering her movement when the shelling started. Even her scooter let her down; she could not, thus, keep up with the others who already fled. Living on the Eastern borders, Abeer's family was forced to escape, following the heavy shelling."

She wiped her tears, and continues, "It was July, 2014 during the Israeli offensive. I cannot forget that day; I was left alone with my father. 25 of my family members left when the shelling got heavier; explosions surrounded the whole area. The Israeli soldiers bombed the Ayaads' house, committing a huge massacre."

Sobbing, Abeer says, "At the beginning, my father asked me to take my scooter that would help me move and get away from the house. I hesitated at first, considering that the Israelis target any moving object most of the time randomly."

She goes on, "I had no choice but to listen to my father. So, I boarded the scooter and left. I did not know where to go; I was moving among scenes of carnage. All the way, I could see pieces of human bodies: an amputated hand, and a smashed head here. Over there, I could clearly see parts of a leg scattered around, and a pile of dead bodies."

Abeer points out, "I was unaware of what was going on as if I were in a coma. I did not feel the shrapnel that hit my foot; I did not hear the sound of the rocket when it exploded where I was. A while later, I heard my father's voice calling me. Still, I could not see him; it was so dark in the area due to the constant explosions."

She sobs, saying "I tried using my vehicle once more to catch up with my father only to hear a voice calling me from behind, telling me that I was hit again. A guy, running with my dad, carried me until we reached the end of Al Mansoura Street. People gathered near the well-known vegetables market, and there, another massacre occurred."

"We stayed in the stores there where some people

helped me bandage my wounded foot; we tried calling a taxi to give us a ride to the hospital, but there was no response. The guy and my father had to carry me; they walked for a distance until we reached Al Zahra School. Luckily, there was a car that took us to Al Shifa hospital."

With tears in her eyes, Abeer says "the doctor examined me and said that my injury was not that serious, and that there are a lot more serious ones waiting. So, he asked me to leave. Very annoyed, I shouted, "I wish I lost my leg; I would rather have my scooter back. I cannot move now." I had no choice but to wait outside for the bus to come and pick us up to go to our shelter in Tal El Hawa."

The next day, Abeer went to the nearby Al Quds hospital, after she felt pain again. The doctors there got the shrapnel out of her leg. Abeer stayed at the shelter for ten days; they seemed like ages to her. Quoting Abeer, "I was alone there; I was mentally devastated because I did not have my wheel chair that was my only assistance in moving and running my errands. My brothers would carry me to the bathroom at the hospital when I had to go there for checkups."

After ten days, Abeer finally got a wheel chair, yet it was not beneficial enough, for the facilities at the shelter she stayed at were not designed for people with disabilities. Again, she felt like she is a burden, and that she is causing her family a lot of trouble.

With feelings of despair and disappointment, Abeer says, "I have gone through a lot already here at the shelter. I didn't have a shower until the 40th day, when the last cease fire was announced. I went to my house to have a shower despite the fact that it was about to collapse any minute; it was partly damaged during the attack."

Abeer graduated from faculty of Community College, majoring in multimedia. She is now studying public relations and journalism at Al Azhar University. All she hopes for now is to have a new scooter so that she can easily move around.

The Israeli forces repeatedly targeted several societies for people with disabilities. Lots of those disabled were martyred; a lot others were injured, increasing their suffering. This is a severe violation to the International Conventions of the rights of people with disabilities.

Fatma, Lost Shelter with 15 Members of her Family

In the first moments of Protective Edge assault on July 7th, Mrs. Fatma Saudi, 56 years, remembered her martyred husband who died in 2007. That woman who lives at a border area called "Jabal Al Rayes," was terrified of the idea of losing again.

Although Fatma did not lose anyone during this aggression, but the destruction of her house by Israeli forces turned her life upside down. She became homeless with her children and grandchildren after they suffered of scourge of the forcible displacement in this aggression,

Fatima said that they were forcibly displaced from their house on July 9th after the occupation missile strikes reached near their house opposite Al Rayes Mount. She adds, "My family and I were 15 people - my children and grandchildren - including an infant that was born a few hours before leaving the house. We went out before the entire area was bombed, and before the massacre in Al Shujayia and Tufah Neighborhoods on July 13th."

The place they took shelter at was Fatima's mother's house which was somehow close to Fatma's house; she stayed on the ground floor with her family along with dozens of her mother's relatives and sisters, who also were displaced from some border areas with their children and grandchildren.

In that place, Israeli war machines targeted Saudi family; precisely, they targeted the second floor. Saudi says: "We did not know that the shelling was over our heads till our neighbors started shouting, 'Get out! The house is being bombed! Get out quickly!' We scurried like crazy; all of us started running and carrying any child we could reach. We screamed as strikes followed in; we went out through an alley so as to hide from the warplanes and drones roaming the sky since they do not distinguish between civilians and freedom fighters. We were all targeted."

She continues, "We arrived at Al Shujayia crossroad at about 1:00 A.M. It took almost 15 minutes for us to get there; we did not know where to go. Fortunately, a relative called and asked us to go to a kindergarten to take shelter until the situation settles down. The kindergarten lacked water and power as well as security which is lacking all over the afflicted Strip forever and ever."

Saudi's family settled in this kindergarten for several days. One day during a humanitarian truce, her children went to check the house; they called her, and said, "It is okay Mom. We will rebuild it again." She replied, "It is okay. What really matters is that you are ok. Just come back."

Saudi says, "I hid my pain and despair from my children in order to keep them strong, instead, I promised them that we would rebuild it, and live in it again, and that we would remember our days both the sweet as well as the bitter."

Fatma adds, "The war was over, and we came back. I went, accompanied by my children, to see the house and the destruction. Here was my shock. I had imagined the scene, but the reality was unbearable. I completely broke down, and my dreams of rebuilding were over; I stayed like this for several days in kindergarten. Then, I finally decided to return and stay on the ruins of my house until the reconstruction. Although this was difficult, and more like dying but being close to my house, and living on its rubble was much better than keeping away while I was mentally broken down."

Fatima still insists on staying amidst the rubble rather than getting out to a safer house that is more suitable for humane life, denouncing the fact that Israeli forces had targeted innocent people in their homes, with no real reason for them to do that. Their pretext for targeting civilians and cause the largest possible number of losses among them is non-existing.

A Day Before being Martyred, We Were a Bride and a Groom, Again

I tried hard to find the house backdoor amid the rubble and ruins of the bombardment; I heard sounds coming from inside, so I knew there are residents in this house. I knocked many times, but there was no answer. I asked a child who was on his way back from school about the owners of this destroyed house. He pointed towards their new place.

The place seemed to be part of a house that contained several rooms which became a pile of black rubble. The poor family did not find any solution but to build a wall to protect their privacy. There was a small room next to this wall in addition to a curtain for a destroyed kitchen. I sat down on a mattress in a small space between the room and the kitchen, and started asking my questions about what had happened.

Um Mohammed Anteiz of Al Shaaf Neighborhood, East of Gaza City told us what had happened with her family, and her middle daughter's husband. She said, "More than 21 members of the family were gathered as we used to do so since the beginning of the aggression. It was almost 8:00 P.M. after Iftar under the staircase for it was the best place that would protect us from the random artillery shelling."

"Suddenly, we heard a huge explosion, and I thought it was far from us. I did not imagine, amid the darkness, that the explosion is on the staircase where my family used to gather every night. I worried about my daughters as they were screaming loudly. I took the flash light, and wandered around the rooms. The smoke was covering the place, so I did not see anything."

She resumed, "I moved around my family, and I was stunned to see my daughter's husband, Mohammed, 24 years, his niece, 2 years, and his cousin, 14 years, covered with their own blood. They were martyred at once owing to direct injuries in the head. I could not help but collapse. I could not believe what had happened."

She went on, "I was shocked by the awfulness of what had happened, and how the tank shells hit those three in particular from all the family members around them. I thanked God that a family massacre did not occur."

The crime took place July 17th, when Al Wafa hospital on the Eastern Line was targeted. The 40 year Umm Mohammed said, "We were thinking about leaving the house to another safer one after the indiscriminate tanks' shelling at Al Wafa hospital had intensified, especially given that the hospital is not so far from Al Rayes Mount area where we live. However, we were unlucky, and the house was bombed killing three

people."

She resumed with hearty tears: "My daughter's husband is not affiliated to any political party; he did not have any kids although he had been married for five years. He loved children, and he was fond of his 2-year-nephew. He was even martyred while hugging him."

She went on while pointing out to the curb that is built currently where the crime was committed, "The entire house was bombed and demolished. Now, we are staying in this small space with my daughter, the martyr's wife, my husband, my only son, and my daughter who is studying at university."

The Martyr's wife, Suha, who was sobbing and crying, interrupted saying, "He was affectionate and compassionate. He loved children and wished to have some, but this was God's will. A night before his death, he insisted on going together for a walk on the beach before the land incursion. We spent a lovely time with each other, and did not really care for the family members' whispers or looks."

She went on with tears preceding her emotional narration, "We spent the last night together chatting. During the aggression, he was used to sleeping at my uncle's; however, that night he broke the habit, and we spent the night together in the company of my brother-in-law."

"That night, he slept for a long time. Unlikely of him, he woke up with a surly face as well as scowling eyebrows. His usual smile was gone. His eyes were so mysterious that I felt they were trying to tell me something, which I did not understand until he was martyred. It seemed that he knew he was going to die," Said Suha.

She recalled a conversation his cousin had told him. She said, "His cousin dreamed about him eating a lot of fruit from a big garden that was full with all souls would crave. My late husband said to his cousin, 'This is paradise, but it is not you who is going there, it is me, God willing.'"

Suha, who is in her twenties, and whose soft body still holds features of childhood, said, "I decided to enroll back at school to finish my high school which I was deprived of, and I pray to God Almighty to help me and put me on the right path."

Layla Obeid...a Critical Injury Disfiguring Her Face.

It all occurred on June 22nd, 2014. A heavy shelling on Layla's house in Bait Hanoon changed Layla's appearance forever. Forty eight year old Layla cannot look herself in the mirror, for she would see nothing but a disfigured face. After her critical injury, her jaw, eye lid, and face were replaced by artificial ones.

Layla recalls the memories of that horrible day, saying, "Nobody living in the neighborhood ever expected that they would survive; the shelling was so heavy that it was impossible for anybody to even run away. It was not only the air strikes but also the random artillery shells directed towards our house like crazy.

Our three-floor building was targeted, the first bomb fell on the last floor, and so we all, more than 80 people, ran away to the first floor."

She goes on, "We were shouting, and calling for our children to make sure they were all there. Some of them were asleep; we did not know where the others were. Then, there was a shower of bombs; we screamed as blood splattered everywhere."

Layla's husband Ahmed, 46 years old, was injured in the head. Her son Mahmoud, 23 years old, was also injured in the head; his critical injury made him stay in the hospital at the ICU for more than a month, battling with death.

Her daughter Dawlat, 25 years old, was hit in the chest by shrapnel. Her 10 year old daughter, Rahma's legs were burned. Layla had the biggest share; she received big, boiling shrapnel that hit her face, burning it.

Layla could barely talk; deep down her heart ached, agonizing over her distorted face. She wished that she had died right after her injury.

She says, "I thought it would be easier than it really is. After I was injured, I was rushed to Al Shifaa hospital in Gaza owing to my critical condition and the gravity of my burns. I stayed there for a whole week, battling pain and bleeding. Then, I had a referral to Nasser Medical Institute in Egypt. My sister accompanied me there."

Um Mahmoud spent 49 days in Egypt, during which she was given different medications and pain killers until she was assigned six plastic surgeries: two in her smashed jaw, one in her critically injured face, two patches on her eye lid, one at the top and another at the bottom. She still needs other plastic surgeries so that her face, which was once pretty before the Israeli machinery destroyed it, could look better.

Robbed of her bright life, aspirations, and dreams, Layla is now staying with her sons, daughters, and her daughter-in-law whose four months fetus was killed inside her uterus by the Israeli foul shells.

She was hoping to have a baby boy so that she would name him "Ahmed" after his now injured grandfather. As we were talking to her, Layla interrupted, crying, "My daughter-in-law used to ask me every time she meets me, 'Do I look pregnant; is it showing yet?' I was impatiently waiting for my first grandson. Now that my face is disfigured, I guess I would hide from my grandchildren until they grow up and become able to recognize that what I am facing is nothing but a pure Israeli act of brutality."

Layla has a lot to tell us. She talks about her destroyed house inside which all their belongings were. She says that even her engaged daughter's new clothes, make up, shoes were gone; some of them were burned, others were torn under the rubble. Her daughter was supposed to get married on Al Adha Eid. Yet, that big day never came.

Manar... The Occupation Killed Her Mother and Her Three Sisters, and Put Her on a Wheelchair

A fourteen year old brunette child with dreamy eyes named Manar Shayboub Al Shenbary was a girl that, prior to July 24th, 2012, was just living the atmosphere of 'Protective Edge' Aggression; however, after this day, she became one of the aggression's victims. She became a wounded, moving around on a wheelchair and prostheses.

It was a Thursday afternoon, and after the artillery shelling of the tanks as well as the raids of the military airplanes had intensified, around 1500 people of the area had to leave their houses, and head to an UNRWA School in Bait Hanoun. Each group of families, regardless of the high number of members of the one family, was put in one classroom, with no bed, no food, or water. Refugees were packed beside the blackboards, drawing their dreams as well as hopes to stay alive.

Al Shenbary family was targeted during the Israeli artillery shelling of the refugees in Bait Hanoun School which was hit by nine shells. The first and the second shells hit the classroom where the family was taking shelter, tearing apart twenty-three human bodies of children as well as adults with no mercy.

Manar, who recently came back from treatment in Jordan, said, "The first two shells fell on our classroom; the ambulances arrived, and transferred seven martyrs of our family. Then, sixteen other people sustained injuries, mostly serious."

She turned her wheelchair around, and went on, "I fled my house, which became rubble; then, my family and I headed towards the school, hoping not to be bombed there. Yet, the Israeli tanks viciously opened fire at our classroom, throwing two bombs in our way."

She paused for moments, and then painfully resumed, "My mother, step-mother, cousins, my sister Mariam, and my brothers Abed and Ali, who used to beg my mother to pray that he would not die were all killed. The second shell killed the rest of my siblings and amputated my leg when shrapnel had littered everywhere, burning part of spine and spleen."

Manar continued, "I lost consciousness for ten days, and when I woke up in the hospital in Jordan, I was on a strange bed without a father or mother to ease my sorrows and pains. I woke up from the coma to find myself with synthetic feet and bandaged stomach and back, not actually knowing what had happened to them."

Mahmoud, Manar's nineteen year old brother, who stayed also in a coma for several days sustained fractures in the pelvis; in addition, his left leg artery was replaced with an artificial one.

He stated, "I called my sister to reassure her that she would not return to that classroom again; I told her that we have rented and furnished a house in Jabalia, Northern Gaza. We used the few items that remained in our house. Manar had not known that the Israeli war machines had completely destroyed our house, and that not even one stone was left."

Manar's health conditions stabilized, and so she returned from Jordan. When the new academic year started, Manar could only sit at her new window watching the healthy students as they go to their schools.

She hopes to resume her education in the following year, and to be able to walk on her new prostheses on her own without the need for someone to take her to the bathroom.

Najaat Ishtewi... Was Given Five Minutes to Evacuate Her Nine Children

Najaat Ishtewi is a 43 year old mother of nine children. She underwent excessive levels of fear and anxiety during the 'Protective Edge' Assault on Gaza due to the fact that she lives in Al Zaitoun Neighborhood, East of Gaza City which was heavily targeted by the Israeli war machinery. On August 1st she heard the neighbors yelling at her, asking her to evacuate her house upon receiving a phone call from the Israeli Army.

Najaat says, "On July 21st we were forced to leave our house, so we went to my cousin's house in Al Sheikh Redwan Area. Similarly, all residents of our neighborhood evacuated. The intensity of the bombardment forced everybody to do so."

She resumes, "With the beginning of the truce, we came back to check on our house lest it was hit by a random artillery shell. The time was passing slowly, and my husband told me 'let's sleep here tonight, and if the bombing intensifies, we will leave in the morning'. Thus, we stayed in the house as my husband had wished."

Najaat talks about the painful memories that do not leave her, "After two hours, my husband asked me to put on my cloak (Abaya) so as to be prepared for anything; he expressed his discomposure because of the heavy shelling."

After sunset, the neighbors' voices and screams pierced the air; they were calling the Ishtewi family to leave the house for the Israeli Army had called them to inform of their intention to bomb the house. Najaat rushed to quickly gather her children for five minutes only separated her and her family from death. Everyone was petrified as they walked out. They managed to leave the house which, five minutes later, was bombed.

Najaat points out, "When I arrived at my sister-in-law's house a few meters away from my own, I realized that my eighteen month old baby girl was not with us. Like crazy, I ran hurriedly although people were trying to grab me and prevent me from going into the house for fear that it would be bombed while I was inside."

She continues, "As fast as he could, my elder son, nineteen years old, went to look for his baby sister, and just one minute prior to the air strike, he came out without his sister. He signaled me that she was not there. I was relieved, knowing that she was alive somewhere. Later, I found her at her uncle's house; someone had dropped her off there."

After the assault and being forcibly displaced, Najaat, her husband, and their children moved into a rented apartment at Asqoula Intersection, but only after great suffering for the husband to find it. The family has suffered greatly due to the landlords' fear of renting their houses to families whose houses had been targeted lest another aggression would be launched and these families would be targeted again.

Nour and Her Family Were Injured in an UNRWA Shelter

Throughout the 'Protective Edge' assault, the first thing Mrs. Nour used to do when she woke up was to touch her husband's face so as to make sure that he was beside her, then she would get up to check her own face in the mirror, and head to check up on her three children, Mohammed, Tamer, and Haytham.

However, her fears came true on Wednesday, July 30, 2014 when the Israeli forces raided "Abu Hussien" School where Nour and her family were forcibly displaced at. They all sustained injuries between light to moderate.

Nour lost her house in Bait Hanoun Town after being forcibly displaced when it was targeted by the Israeli random bombardment of the area.

As soon as shells started pouring on them, Nour was awed by the memory of losing her mother who was killed back in 2008 during 'Cast Lead' Assault in Bait Hanoun Town

Nour says, "I tried to be strong in front of my family, and to bear the pain silently, yet, the shelling was rapidly getting closer until it hit our house."

She resumes, "I do not know how we got out of our house, or how we got to "Abu Hussien" School. People had pulled us out and taken us there; my husband was slightly injured."

Like all other displaced people who took refuge at 'Abu Hussien' UNRWA School, North of Gaza Strip, Nour and her family were victims of an Israeli trap.

On the dawn of July 30, 2014, Israeli Forces targeted 'Abu Hussien' School where hundreds of Palestinians were taking refuge, killing about fifteen and wounding dozens. Israel Forces justified this attack by saying rockets had been launched from the school; the matter that was totally denied by UNRWA.

Fifteen displaced people were martyred in this massacre; furthermore, Nour, her husband, and two of their children sustained injuries between light to moderate. Nour says, "I lost consciousness, and woke up at Al Shifa Hospital. I did not know what had happened to me, nor my husband's and children's fate."

She carries on, saying, "I realized that my face was injured, and then when my kids hurried towards me, I realized that they were wounded by shrapnel as well...." Mohammed, her six year old son, interrupts her, saying, "Mom, I was by your side, and I stayed awake even though I was injured. We were scattered on the ground, and there were a lot of martyrs and wounded; we stayed there until the ambulances came, and took us to the hospital."

Nour kept wandering around the hospital between the wounded until she was finally able to find her husband. He was lying on a hospital bed beside his three children, including Tamer whose clothes were so bloody. The family stayed for two consecutive days in the hospital until the husband was able to walk on his own. He took his wife, and children to Al Karmel School in the middle of Gaza City so as to stay there until the aggression came to an end.

Although the aggression was in fact over, the suffering of this family was not. The father had to find a place for his family to stay for they have lost their house as well as the barber shop which was a good source of income previously. The aggression has ended, announcing the beginning of a journey of misery and hardship for the Gazans both mentally and physically.

Hadiah.... "Protective Edge" Assault Took Away Her Friend and House

Hadiah, whose name means the quiet one in Arabic, was, in fact, quiet. However, after the Israeli assault, Protective Edge, she was not quiet anymore. The 15 year old girl's life became imbued once with her memories of being forcibly displaced from her house at Al Shujayia Neighborhood, East of Gaza City, and once with the loss of her soul-mate, her friend Najiah Jihad Al Helou.

The events of this sore story started on the 13th day of the assault on the Gaza Strip. On that day, Israeli raids killed Najiah. Hadiah cried for the loss of her friend who was killed along with 28 members of her family in an Israeli bombardment that targeted their house on Al Nazaz Street, East of the afflicted neighborhood.

Hadiah says, "We resorted to a school to the west of the city so as to take shelter from the Israeli raids that did not differentiate between civilians and militants. Tension took over us; I was the only one in my family that was not afraid except when the Israeli forces went crazy, yet, I used to hide my fear in order to comfort my family instead of discouraging them.

With a low voice at points, and a strong one at others, the girl seemed eager to speak and tell what had happened. She resumes, "As we were sitting in the classroom where we were forcibly displaced listening to the news from here and there, the news about martyrs was piercing our ears every now and then. Then, one of girls approached me to tell me there had been a new massacre in Al Shujayia Neighborhood, namely against the family of someone called Jihad Al Helou. The girl asked me whether I knew him since I was from that area."

The news shocked Hadiah; however, the bigger shock was when she realized that the targeted people were actually her friend, Najiah Al Helou, and her family.

Hadiah recalls these painful moments saying, "I was so shocked that it affected me mentally; I screamed loudly to the point every body's heart was broken for me. It was indescribable. I completely collapsed for I have never imagined that death could come so easily."

On the last school field trip Hadiah and the late Najiah went on, they bought a watch which Hadiah still wears. "The last time we met at school, she was laughing a lot; we took a score of photos; we bid each other farewell at the end of the school year; and we went home feeling joyful for the vacation had begun," Hadiah describes the last time she saw her friend.

She carries on, "The war is over, but memories are not and will not be over. We came back to a destroyed house. Yet, it does not matter for souls have been lost and others have been devastated upon this loss. Our houses will be rebuilt; nevertheless, who will restore and return the souls we have lost for us?!!"

She goes back to talking about Najiah saying, "My hope was and still is to hold her and bid her farewell, or even to see her in my dreams, even for one time. Israel has destroyed us with no right; it killed the innocent, and no one took action to stop the bloodshed. Israel killed Najiah with cold blood while she was trying to stay safe in her house among her family who all died in brutal bombardment like a lot of other innocent families."

Life is Not the Same Any More

Kareem, one month old, was killed by a drone missile, while his mother, Nawal Abu Zeid, 26, was carrying him. The 18th of July of "Protective Edge" operation was unlike any other day for his family. Four women of Kareem's relative were killed in targeting their four-story house, two of his cousins and his newlywed uncle Ahmed passed away too. Furthermore, his mother Nawal has lost her right hand and two fingers in her left hand.

Nawal commented, "I was breast feeding him; it is just wrong... On that night, the first day of Eid, we felt that we were in danger, as there was an intense warplanes sound above us. We tried to support each other by gathering in one place."

On that night, three missiles targeted Zeid family house. Nawal Said, "I looked around me as everyone was bleeding and walls has collapsed, I do not recall what has happened after that."

Nawal was in a comma, after waking up she was in shock. She learned that her little son had died, and all of her kids were getting treatment in different hospitals, including her daughter who doctors transferred her to Nablus for treatment. Luckily, her son Nedal was found after going missing hiding in his grandmother closet alive.

Nawal's life has changed dramatically. She does not feel secure anymore as her house was gone and her family was separated from each other. She said that, "the war broke many beautiful things inside of us. Life is not the same anymore."

The Child Who Lives in Neama's Dreams

In a small room, she was looking for any intact official papers in a pile of papers that she retrieved from the rubble of her house. Next to her, an elderly woman in her sixties sitting in a wheel chair. The old woman seemed sick and tired. When my eyes met the young woman's eyes, she smiled a little, sighed, and said, "This is how difficult our life is."

Neama Arada, 30, insisted to speak in formal Arabic with us. She is proud of this language especially Arabic poetry. She started to recall the memories of the invasion of 2014, "I was residing Abu Ajeen area, eastern of Deir Balah city, with my mother who is in a wheel chair. We left our house when we felt danger is imminent. As artillery and missile were getting closer, we left our house and headed to Hekr area. The road was long and dangerous because we could not find a vehicle to take us. After we got there, we started to look to rent an apartment."

"I did not know anyone in this area. I spent much time in looking for a safe apartment to rent. At last, I found a small one that cost a lot. We spent the night in the new apartment while explosions and the sound of warplanes did not stop. Every time that we tried to sleep, we woke up again."

On the next day, around eight in the morning, Neama headed to the grocery to buy some food for her mother who suffers chronic high blood pressure, because she has to take the medication after a meal. One the way to the grocery, Neama said, "Not far away were I was walking, a group of children were playing. Suddenly, an explosion went off next to them without a pre-warning. I fell down, and smoke and dust was everywhere." She continued that "a body of a dead child fell next to me, with his insides out... Oh God!... I tried to save his life and to hold his body but it was very burning. I could not carry his body... I will never forget that incident."

The Israeli occupation did not consider that children are playing next to the targeted house, or that civilians are walking in the street. Neama feels upset because she could not help the little child, she said, "I wrote a poem in his memory, I found out later that he comes from Abu Mashy family. I wish I could meet his mother so that I could give her the poem... It was the most difficult situation I ever been in. This child always comes in my dreams and still can't forget the scene; I am mentally tired and stressed out."

She continued her story, "I went back to my mother very scared... I went back empty handed, but thanks to Allah that I was not injured. I remember that night my mother have taken her medicine with a little of water; I was worried about her."

"For what reason we were replaced? Moreover, why everything beautiful in our life was a target? The Israeli machine killed many Kids without any known reason." The Occupation had destroyed Abu Ajeen area; and Neama's house was among those houses. She dreams of going back to her house where comfort and security is. She actually could not save money for the rent. The occupation forces have taken her favorite place; her mother always tells her, "when are going back to our house and to my bed."

Dying In Front of Her Grandchild

The pain caused by “Protective Edge” aggression will remain rooted in the mind of Salsabeel Akaram Abu Shanab, 11. She had to leave her house by force, and to leave behind the dead body of her grandmother that was torn into parts by an Israeli missile.

The details of the story go back to Sunday, 20 July 2014 in Shijaeya neighborhood. Salsabeel’s father preferred to not evacuate, as his family which consists of 14 members, are too many to evacuate, or on the basis “He didn’t want to overburden his friends or relatives” by taking shelter at their house. The situation was getting worse. Finally, her father changed his mind, she said, “we evacuated the house at six in the morning; bare footed, some of us were in our pajamas. My grandmother told us to go in separate groups, and each group take a separate road.”

When Salsabeel started recalling the difficult moments, she was unable to continue, she pulled herself together and said that, “once we started leaving the house, a missile destroyed it. I looked back, and saw my grandmother thrown up in the air and down. Her white scarf was hanging on the electricity column; I stopped and shouted, “my grandma had died, she is dead”.” Salsabeel is regretting leaving her grandmother behind, which has become a nightmare that keeps her sleepless; As she put it, “My mother pulled me to continue my walk. As we were passing over corpses of people, we thought that we had a little chance to stay alive.”

Salsabeel said, “During our evacuation, we were walking next to walls; we wanted to evade shrapnel from arbitrary artillery. I remember my sister who had to walk over fire. She didn’t feel her legs as she was very terrified.”

Salsabeel finally reached with some of her family Omari mosque. Her sister received first aid there. After few hours, her father arrived with his children to the same mosque. Salsabeel told him, “My grandmother has died.” He cried hard, and then everyone stayed at Shefa hospital, then, went to another shelter called Bahrain School.

The aggression has ended, but Salsabeel still suffering; every time she passes by her destroyed house while going to school, she recalls memories of the aggression. Her performance at school has decreased as she lost her grandmother and some of her friends. Salsabeel’s teacher Snaa Soliman commented, “Last year, Salsabeel was a very excellent student. She was talented in reading poetry. She used to participate in all the events at school; she was such a special student. However, after the aggression, she became very introverted, less sociable and easily distracted”

No child in Gaza has not been affected by the Israeli aggression; those who were not injured or killed, they actually were harmed psychologically.

Bleeding To Death

During the “Protective Edge” operation, and on the eve of July 23rd after evening prayer to be exact, a rough night has started for the people of Khazaa village southern of Gaza Strip. Under fire and shelling, Kudeeh family took refuge to a basement that belong to their neighbors. The family had spent that tough night along with 100 people who shared sheets and a bathroom; and the darkness and fear they went through.

After two days of their displacement, Rasmia Kudeeh, 51, has lost her husband and son by targeting their shelter house. The Red Cross could not reach their bodies as they were bleeding for eight days until pulling them out during the first ceasefire in this aggression.

Rasmia's daughter Lina, 32, said, “Getting out of that area was impossible, as the Israeli forces have cut the road between Abbasan and Khozaa villages. We were aware that getting out would cost us our lives. On Wednesday morning, we started to look for any possible way to get out. On that day, a rumor has spread that the Red Cross was waiting for us at the entrance of the village. Therefore, we carried white flags and went out, but shortly after starting walking, the tanks started shooting toward us. So we went back.”

Lina said, “During the early morning hours of Friday, occupation forces targeted the basement with a shell and missile. Black smoke covered the whole place. We started to look for our children and relatives... while rocks were falling on our heads. My mother passed out and my disable sister and my children have been injured.”

These explosions injured three people; Salim Kudeeh and his son Ahmed bleed to death along with Kamal Najjar. The scene of our evacuation was painful; we terrifyingly walked over glass and rubble. We left behind bodies of the three Martyrs who remained under the rubble. The family evacuated to Khan Younis city and we started to call for the Red Cross to evacuate the bodies of Rasmia's husband, her son and her relative.

Rasmia still feels pain and keep shedding tears for losing her husband and son. She said, “I am still not over their absence. I feel broken, however, I try to look strong in front of my children and grandchildren who always ask for their grandfather; he used to love them and always took care of them.”



Not Very Young To Forget

During the 2008 operation Cast Lead, Reda Mgad, 12, was still young to understand who or why her house was being destroyed in Beit Lahia. However, this time, the little girl has grown up and was terrified and in panic during the Israeli "Protective Edge."

The terrible crimes committed by Israeli machines in the little girl's city have traumatized her. Her mother tried not to let her watch the news, but the sound of explosions and the way people acted revealed the dangerous situation.

The worst day for Reda was on July 23, at two in the morning, when the Israeli occupation started shelling her neighborhood. The shrapnel were scattering all over her house.

During that time, Reda was living in panic along with her six brothers and sisters, she said, "we were trapped inside the house all night until the next day. We gathered inside one room except for one brother who preferred to stay in his room. However, a shell from a tank that was taking position at the borders hit his room; he sustained a moderate injury. Her sister, 1 year old, suffered a panic attack and convulsion. They were transported to the hospital by an ambulance." She continued, "we were expecting death at any moment. I have seen fear in the eyes of every member of my family.

Reda's family got out of their house in early morning. Shells were still exploding everywhere during their evacuation to one of "UNRWA" schools northern of Gaza.

After settling at one of refugee centers, a ceasefire was established. Her family decided to go back to see the degree of damage to their house. Reda said, all the houses in our neighborhood were demolished and there were no civilians in the area. As a civilian, we did not commit any crime for our displacement and for destroying our houses."

Reda would not forget what happened to her and her family during this aggression. Everyone went through this kind misery would not forget what has happened; these memories are deeply rooted in the mind of the youngsters and old.





Painful Memories

Despite the nightmares she has, she took a quick nap to try to get over the continued stress and terror of the Israeli “Protective Edge” operation. However, she woke up again by the sounds of a nearby explosion.

On the 15th of July, Afaf Barawy, 47, left her house with her family in Beit Lahia to the closest shelter, for safety and away from the artillery and missiles of the Israeli occupation. Afaf Said, “I moved all my children to one room; I thought they would be safe. I tried to move my children away from news of massacres and other terrifying media coverage. During that time, we were barely have one meal a day.”

At about two in the morning on 15/7/2014, the Israeli warplanes targeted Afaf’s house with three missiles, Afaf recalls, “as our neighbors started screaming at us to evacuate, we got out of the house in Pajamas. I carried my children and ran away from the house. Shortly, the house was bombed and become a pile of rocks in an instance.”

As she was running away, she found out that her youngest son is not with her. People told her that he is probably was ahead of her. However, she could not continue walking without him. At last, one of her neighbors came holding her son’s hand without any injuries, though, he was shocked. His mother said, “He could never be able to forget what he has been through.”

Afaf said that her suffering did not end there; now, she is homeless. Furthermore, the difficult situation they experienced is on their mind all the time. Being away from their house made it difficult even more for Afaf’s family.

Leaving Behind the Most Precious

“Sreej” area is one of the places that suffered mostly during the “Protective Edge” operation. This area is located between Khan Younis city and Garara Village. Zakia Smeiry is a woman among many who lost someone during this operation, but Zakia had to leave her oldest son’s, Abdallah, dead body behind.

Abdallah, 17, sustained an injury when the occupation forces targeted his house. However, he died during the evacuation and his family had to leave him behind. His mother recalls when he was telling her, “I want water, I need to drink”

Abdallah’s mother recalled that day, “On July 18th, we heard explosions in the farmlands around our house. We were breaking our fasting along with 17 relatives who came to take refuge at our house.”

She continued that “a missile hit the back yard outside of our kitchen. We hurried to the living room. At that time, bulldozers were uprooting trees around the house. We put a light on one of the windows to let them know that we were inside the house. All of us, including my husband, brother-in-law, my children, and our neighbors, gathered in one room. However, without a pre-warning a missile has landed on our roof. Sadly, it injured my son Abdallah, my husband, his uncle and his friend.”

In addition, Zakia and her daughters, Shoug and Zeinab, had suffered burns, and shrapnel scattered throughout their bodies. However, Abdallah’s injury was the most difficult. He was bleeding from one in the morning until seven am, without giving him any medical care.

The family decided to evacuate the house during early morning hours under all circumstances. They carried Abdallah while he was bleeding, but he passed away before he would receive any medical treatment. They had to leave him behind and save the others. When they reached the main road, Zakia’s husband and their daughters were transported to a hospital, and then he was sent for treatment in Turkey.

The family’s journey did not end here. They had to go to Rafah city, but bombardment started where they lived. They had to move to Khan Younis until the end of the aggression. Zakia sadly said, “I wanted him to finish his education. Abdallah was my first joy, and I strived to raise him so that he could stand with his sisters... May Allah bless his soul.”



Suha Barzy... Lost Her House, Farm and Security

The 2014 operation on Gaza has ended, but not for Suha Barzy, 42, who keeps checking on her children one by one as if there an imminent danger. Sometimes she asks them to gather in one place and other times she would embrace them.

Suha knew what she was going through is a psychological crisis caused by targeting her house by Israeli machines in Beit Lahia northern of Gaza. On the 27th of July, she survived the bombardment of her house and sheep farm.

Suha recalled her first days of the aggression, “four families including 27 members, have took refuge at our house. My house is too small to have all these people.” Up until the 17th of July the situation were deteriorating, but on that night, at two in morning, the occupation forces started hitting her house with missiles and artillery. This situation forced people inside the house to gather in one room, Suha said, “While we were in the house, they hit houses in the area with artillery. Then they targeted the first and second floors of our house. They also hit our sheep farm with an artillery; everything was considered as a target.” She continued, “Tank shells started to hit the house from every direction. But thanks to Allah that we have stayed alive.”

During the first morning hours and under fire, all of them left the house to a safer place. She continued. “We went out running in the morning while artillery didn’t stop for a second. We actually did not take any of our belongings. We have seen the town as it was destroyed and seen people running in terror.”

The house has become unsuitable for living. They burned their memories and life that meant everything for the family. Now, she does not hide her psychological problems caused by the operation by describing herself as, “being psychologically unstable and always in stress and panic.”



Targeting A Family at the 10th Minute of A Ceasefire

On the fifth of august, at about ten after ten in the morning, a humanitarian ceasefire was broken after only 10 minutes of its initiation. During “Protective Edge” operation, Israel had broken the agreement by targeting the house of Bakry family. The family lives in four-level building which located in Shate’ camp west of Gaza. As the camp itself, the building was condensed with civilians.

Five members of the Bakry family were killed, three children and one woman among them, by targeting their building. Many of their neighbors have sustained injuries between moderate to critical. Raesa Bakry, 60, told us their story when they, “were preparing breakfast for our children. We felt safe as the ceasefire temporary stopped the fight. However, missiles started to fall on the building, within seconds; it was a pile of rocks.”

Raesa’s sister-in-law, her two daughters, Aseel and Asmaa, and her brother Ramadan and his son were killed in this incidence. The rest of the family have sustained different injuries including, Yasmeen, 12, who sustained critical burn injury. The little girl was puzzled about why the building has been bombed and kept saying that her mother was only “Kneading.” Raesa continued, “She keeps repeating: Dough, roller, bread, a rock fell in the pot.”

Raesa would start crying every time the little child ask for his mother or his sister, she said, “The ambulances came over for the injured, but the rescue teams kept looking under the rubble for dead bodies for three days. We did not expect that my family would be killed with cold blood.”

Rawan's Journey To Recovery

When Abo Mohammed, 54, pulled his daughter Rawan, 10, out of the rubble, he thought she had passed away. Fortunately, he checked her pulse to find that she is still alive. He took her to the hospital right away to start a long journey of medical treatment.

Rawan lives in "Alnajjar" neighborhood in Khozaa village. Her house was one of few houses that are still standing. Om Mohammed, 51, told us her story while shedding tears, "on the 24th of Ramadan, shelling started to target civilians and houses in the area. We thought we were safe, until we were trapped inside of our house. We heard explosions going off nearby. The glass of our windows were crashed and even the house entrance was blocked."

"During the bombardment, we started screaming, all of us hid in the house including: my children, my son, his wife and children; and I. When explosions of the missiles continued, my husband decided to hide in our neighbor's basement where three families already been there. During the night, we were terrified, and I started praying for things to get better. We stayed there for 3 days but a missile targeted the basement and a wall had collapsed on Rawan."

"My husband pulled Rawan out of the rubble. He kissed her goodbye, but he accidentally felt her pulse. We gave her first aid using "onion", alcohol, and CPR, while she was still bleeding but alive."

The family raised a white flag and carried Rawan and her brother Yaser who sustained a light injury. Om Mohammed continued, "we walked till we reached "Rawadeen" area. We ran by a cart pulled by a donkey, we put all the injured on it and kept going. Tanks were taking position on the entrance of Khozaa; despite firing at us, we kept going until we reached Abbasan village where ambulances were waiting for us."

Rawan was treated in the intensive care unit for six day at The European hospital east of Khan Younis. She has sustained broken skull and bleeding in the brain; also, she had injuries all over her body. Doctors transferred her to the Palestinian Red Crescent hospital in Khan Younis where she stayed for 17 days. Finally, doctors decided to move her abroad to Turkish hospitals and after local rehabilitation sessions, she was back on her feet.

The mother looked at her daughter and said, "after her full recovery, she became more violent. However, I can't imagine the house without her!" With a smile on her face, Rawan said, "I wasn't able to stand, walk or play before, but now I can run and play; I even went back to school."



Running Away To Death

One of the bloodiest crimes during “Protective Edge” aggression was killing the family of Engineer Ibrahim Kelany, 53. As he held a German citizenship, he was intending to travel to Berlin once the aggression would end. However, the occupation forces did not let him or his family achieve that.

The Israeli warplanes targeted Ibrahim’s family on the 21nd of July when it destroyed 5 levels of Salam tower where the family was staying at. His wife and his children: Yasmeen, Sawsan, Reem, Ilias and Yaser along with four other people of his relative, killed in this incident. Many other people have been injured or killed; it took the rescue teams hours to reach them under rubble. After receiving warnings about staying in Beit Lahia, northern of Gaza, Ibrahim left the area to rent a house close to his in-laws. He then figured that the new place is not safe because of its location to the nearby Shijaeya. Therefore, he decided to move to the center of Gaza.

The family stayed at Salam residential tower for several days. However, on the 21st of July, the Israeli warplanes destroyed the tower at 8 in the afternoon after breaking fasting during the holy month of Ramadan.

His brother Deeb, 49, recalls that, “the tower collapsed on residents without any pre warnings. The tower was full of innocent civilians. The death of Ibrahim’s family was a huge blow to us; the occupation didn’t let them eat their last meal...”

Deeb added, “A day before his death, Ibrahim came over to convince me to go with him to the new apartment, saying, ‘it is safer.’ Because I have cardiac problems, he thought that I would get to the hospital quickly in case of any health complications. However, I refused to go with him and insisted on not leaving my house.

A Terrifying Day for Naela

Naela Abu Hajras, 22 years, was forced inside a bathroom in her house with her children for a whole day while Israeli forces were interrogating her husband during the "Protective Edge" operation.

Her family did not want to evacuate their house because they thought there were no safer place. She still does not believe that they have stayed alive after what they went through. On the night of the 18th day of the holy month of Ramadan, the bombardment outside had become so intense that they could not leave..The loud sounds of warplanes above them made the late decision of evacuation impossible. As she put it "during that night, a black smoke entered our place through windows. It smelled very bad, so we went to the safest place in the house, the steps of the house. Then, as the explosions were getting nearer, Israeli soldiers started asking us in Hebrew to get out."

The soldiers broke into their house and pointed their guns at them. They lead them out and her husband stayed with them inside. Then they put Naela and her children inside a bathroom. One of the soldiers told her, "You are lucky that you have stayed alive. We had orders to kill."

Naela continued. "They interrogated my husband. One time they closed the bathroom window, so my children started itching. The next day, they asked us to leave without my husband."

For three days, Naela did not hear any news about her husband. When her uncle went back to their house, he did not find her husband there. Naela was stressed out and filled with fear about not knowing the fate of her husband.

Once a ceasefire was established, she went back to check on her house. The house was unfortunately damaged severely, so she had to rent a house in Khan Younis. Luckily, her husband found his way back to her safely and they have the chance to restart their life together with hope for a more peaceful future.

Sheltering At School

Om Gasem Bihairy, 42, was trying to get updated of any news regarding the military operation “Protective Edge” from her neighbors. She wanted to know if there would be a ground operation so that she could evacuate instantly with her husband and four children. The family lives in Abu Ajeen area eastern of Deir Balah, which considered a hot area for its closeness to the Israeli borders. She started, “I tried to get hold of myself at the beginning of the last operation as I didn’t come over the terror and fear I felt during the 2008 and 2012 invasions. I was embracing my children during their fear and terror, but I couldn’t stop the continued sounds of warplanes and explosions.”

Continuing her story, Om Gasem narrated, “We had to leave our house at the beginning of the ground invasion as our roof, which made of thin layer of concrete, started to fall on us as a result of the nearby explosions. During our escape, a missile targeted two men on a motorcycle. While both were on fire, we started to scream and cry. I tried to avoid my children to look at them.”

She went on, “We continued walking as there wasn’t any means of transportation. On the way, there was a family on a donkey-pulling cart have already been targeted; their dead bodies were on the ground. Neither my children nor I could handle what we have seen, so we started crying.”

“We finally reached a school to take it as a shelter. However, we didn’t take any of our personal official papers; or food or clothes with us.”

“Two of my children have renal failure and salts. Their condition was deteriorating, as hospitals could not treat them, because it worked for emergency cases. On the other hand, the health conditions at the shelter were very bad as it lacks proper hygiene, besides the high number of refugees. Infection was easily transmitted as they didn’t separate ill people from healthy ones.”

Her other pain is dealing with her mentally ill husband who she said, “Became very irritated, as a result of not finding his long term medication. I was very confused and tired of dealing with my husband and sick children. Even the shelter could not provide healthy food or clean water for them.” “Om Gasem” waited for the operation to end, so she could go back to her house. However, she returned to find it a pile of rocks. At the end, she had to take the shelter as her temporary home.

Living the Toughest Life through War

In her Sixties, Magboola Sukkar has lived a long life of dedication and striving. However, living the “Protective Edge” operation was an unprecedented experience. She lost her house and her only source of living and ended up in a shelter.

Her house was on the eastern road of Shijaeya; eastern of Gaza. She narrated her story of surviving a massacre that remains a black spot in the history of Israel, as she put it, “The high sounds of explosions put her family in hysterical panic. The bombs were getting closer and closer; we thought that we are living our last seconds of our life.”

Without hesitation, her family decided to leave; as most of people in the neighborhood started running out in midst of random bombardment, she described their evacuation by saying, “My brother-in-law’s son was injured during evacuation. People carried him immediately to a safer place. We took refuge at Darj School in the middle of Gaza.”

She continued, “Now all our relatives become unemployed, as we lost 180 sheep which we were raising in our animal farm.”

Magbola’s daughter-in-law shared her experience, saying, “We hardly have money for our kids to go to school; they have to go over the rubble and demolished houses in Shijaeya to get to school every day. The harsh life we are living as refugees is worsening our situation by becoming more stressed out.”

Magbola ended her talk saying, “I never imagined myself after all those years to be a refugee. We were lucky to stay alive, but we are dying every day by living this difficult life.”



A Story of Endurance

Once the “Protective Edge” operation ended, Hana Hasanat- the wife of prisoner Abdelmonem Hasanat- was still determined to keep the issue of Palestinian prisoner in Israeli jails heard by the international community. Outside the Red Cross headquarter in Gaza, she continued protesting against her husband’s imprisonment. We took the chance to take a closer look on her life during the last military operation.

She described her experience during the evacuation of her family from Mughraqa village as unforgettable. Narrating her experience, Hana, 38 years, told us, “As the sound of bombardment was getting closer, the floor and the walls of the room were shaking. All of us, including, my three children, my mother in law; and my sister, her husband, and their six children, gathered in one small room.”

Meanwhile, the family had received a phone call from the Israeli Army that they have to evacuate to Deir AL Balah city, Hana recalled that , “the call made us even more worry over our life. By not giving a specific route for our evacuation, we were terrorized. We left the house through a window, because the gate of the house was more dangerous. However, I recalled not taking my mother in law who I went back for. She insisted on us to go without her, but we took her by force and left.”

She continued. “Seeing people running hysterically in the streets was an unprecedented experience for me. Luckily, we put my mother in law on a cart that was moving to our direction. However, moving south was difficult as there were many children with us.”

“We arrived to Nosirat camp, south of our area, tired and exhausted. We did not believe that we made it without losing anyone from our family. We were definitely lucky ones.”



Poisonous Bombs

Sounds of explosions could be heard easily in most areas of Gaza; shells and missiles were targeting open and civilian areas. As the bombardment have continued, Mahmoud, 18, a mentally ill young man, continued shouting randomly and going around the house with his fingers in his ears.

That's how his mother, Om Jaber Abu Said, 42, described Mamoud's condition during the last "Protective Edge" operation. When we met her, she was looking for any useful belonging of her three sons among the rubble of her house. She lives in Wadi Salqa on the borders with Israel, east of Deir Balah, she narrated, "During the first day of the ground invasion of Gaza Strip, bombardment has been intensified, and warplanes were lighting the night sky of the area."

"Suddenly, I heard my neighbors yelling at us to evacuate immediately; once my sons and I reached the house gate, there was a dead body. We didn't stop, we continued running as bombardment continued"

She continued, "My sons; Jaber, 22, and Yousif, 21, took Mamoud, who was screaming, and ran away. I could not see them as they were running as fast as they could. I was in my praying clothes and not ready to leave suddenly; as I didn't expect the situation would get this bad."

"We took shelter at a school where thousands did the same. It was a bad place to stay in. It lacked enough food or sheets; I was very hungry and thirsty. I started to call for help through the media, but no one responded to our call."

"Om jabber" became alone after her three sons left the school and took their mentally ill brother to another place. As she put it, "After a ceasefire was established, I went back to check on my house. I have seen the dead body of the same person before. Oh Allah!... it was terrifying."

She added, "I also seen unexploded shells on the floor of the house which was also partially damaged. After three days of returning to school, one of my neighbors called me to say that my house was completely destroyed."

"Once I heard the bad news, I passed out. I was in a comma in the hospital for 4 days; I actually was in a comma several times after that. Doctors said that the reason for the comma is inhaling poisonous gas; besides the psychological and mental stress I was in."

"Now, I become sick and sleep alone at the school; without friends or family who left to take care of my mentally sick son. He needs special care such as feeding and changing diapers." She asks why all that had happened to her as a civilian.

"Om Jabber" hopes for peace to return and rebuilding would start. She does not want to see the scenes of dead bodies and destruction again. Nevertheless, she wanted Gaza children and youth's beautiful dreams become a reality.

A family's Endless Tragedy

The life of Namal family would never be the same after the Israeli last offensive. On August 1, 2014, an Israeli missile targeted them during their evacuation from Tanoor neighborhood, eastern of Rafah. "Om Wael Namla", 45, lost four of her children and grandsons; five others would continue their life on wheel chairs.

"Om Wael" lived with four of her daughters and two of her sons with their children and wives. The mother said, "The first of august was such a dark day; The Israeli bombardment has intensified around our house. Everyone in the house started to scream in panic; my son Yousef told me, "We have to leave now; the house is not safe and everyone in the area had left"."

Om Wael's husband preferred no not leave and stay with her. However, he asked his sons to evacuate with their children and wives, Om Wael said, "Shortly after exiting the house; I heard an explosions near our house. I was sure something bad happened to them, because they didn't go too far."

Om wael became very emotional but she got hold of herself and continued, "A massacre was committed next to "Belbeesy junction", when a drone missile targeted civilians in that area and killed my son and others." At last she went into a crying episode; her son Wael initiated to talk, "The Israeli occupation has committed a crime against civilians who were mostly children and women. In seconds, everyone was lying down in a pool of blood."

Om Wael's son Yousef, his wife, and his son died instantly; however, the only one of Yousef's family who stayed alive is his 3 months baby boy. Om Wael's daughter Nagham, 11, died in the hospital after few hours of her arrival. Om Wael's oldest son Wael got his left leg amputated by the explosion and his right leg was shattered; Wael's wife had her two legs amputated and their son Shareef, 3, had his left leg amputated. His daughter Abeer, 2, sustained injuries and burns in her leg. His sister Shahd, 12, sustained burns all over her body.

Om Wael narrated her reaction once hearing the bad news, "During afternoon hours, we heard about the incidence but couldn't know who was a live nor who is dead. We could not verify the news

as it was impossible to get out of the house."

The bodies of Om Wael's family: Yousif, his wife, and their son, were in the European Hospital in Khan Younis; and the family received the three months old baby. However, it took the rescue team three days to find Nagham's body, little Shahed commented, "I saw everything; I have seen my sister Nagham blown in the air and then fell on the ground."



Wael's wife, 20, said while lying on the bed, "I felt my leg dislocated from my body while I was carrying my daughter, but then I could not move at all. I saw Nagham and Yousef while lying on the ground before they have died. I passed out after that."

After few days, the hospital administration decided to transfer Wael's wife to Hebron, Wael and his son to Nablus and his daughter to Magased Hospital where her grandmother accompanied her. Such sporadic transfer was hard on the mother and father; their hospitalization lasted for a month and a half. At the end, they reunited together and started a new life that will never be as happy as before.

Killing Olive Trees

Reflecting the pain and suffering inside her, the eyes of "Om Ramy Abu Msaed", 40, were full of tears. She started to cry as she recalled the latest Israeli attack on Gaza Strip.

She started, "I honestly don't know where to start from; the pain is great. I always try to get it off my mind, but I have failed every time."

Sitting on a rock, holding up her cheek with the palm of her hand, she looked at what has been left of her farm after the Israeli army bulldozed it. With tears in her eyes and with a strangled voice, she said, "On the seventh day of the Israeli aggression, on June 14th, 2014, to be exact, my oldest son "Ramy" was killed on his motorcycle when he was on his way to get food for us. This was the first blow I received during the last offensive."

She added: "They killed the most precious person I know... They targeted him in

'Heker' area in Deir El Balah city. I couldn't have 'a last look' because what remained of his body was completely burned by the explosion."

Her affliction did not end here, she continued, "Because of the loud sounds of nearby explosions, my other son "Mohammed", 20, has partially lost his hearing. He also suffered a psychological trauma, especially because of the death of his brother "Ramy".

She continued: "My son "Mahammed" couldn't handle the death of his brother, who was his best friend. Now I don't know whether to cry for my dead son or for Mohammed's misery."

"Om Ramy" wonders about the kind of sin that "Ramy" committed to receive such a barbaric execution.

She continued her story about her tormented experience during the aggression. "As a result of arbitrary shelling, we evacuated from our house in the "Kisovim" area, east of the city of Deir El Balah, along with our neighbors and residents of that area."

"We took refuge at a school until the operation ended. We then returned to our house, away from the discomfort of schools which lack clean bathrooms or sheets to sleep on."

"I was shocked when I have found my house partially destroyed by the Israeli war planes. It had become

unsuitable for living."

She said, "according to an agency responsible for evaluating damages that works under the UNDP, my house was damaged significantly."

"Om Ramy's" catastrophe didn't end here; the Israeli occupation uprooted more than 20 olive trees and killed all the poultry she was raising on her farm.

She continued painfully: "what have 'the trees' done to be burnt and uprooted in this barbaric way? What have my birds done to them? Were they shooting at them? Or what?!"

Pointing at her farmland, which has become a wasteland, she said: "do you see this desert land; it used to be a green paradise. In fact, it was my children's and my own little garden. These are the traces of the bulldozers and tanks; they have destroyed it without giving any reason. My seven children, my sick husband who can't work, and I used to live from this garden."

"The farmland and poultry were our only source of money. We have spent years taking care of this farmland; I have given up hope in everything. How and when will we be able to plant it again?"

"They turned my green garden into a scary wasteland, I can't think about it and I have no idea about my future. How would we make a living? I have lost everything, without committing any crime."

Every time "Om Ramy" has tried to run away from pain, another comes to haunt her again; her pain and suffering for what she has lost is becoming unbearable.

She added that winter is almost here and life in my destroyed house will be impossible. In addition, I don't have the money to rent a place. I used to impatiently wait for winter, for it watered my crops, which have been destroyed by the Occupation forces."

During the olive harvest season, when all farmers sell their olives, however, "Om Ramy" feels sore and wish her trees were still there so that she could live the most beautiful moments of the year. This year will be different; even the taste of olives, will be bitter...

The “Agha” Family: Evacuation Under Bombardment

Seeking more family support during “Protective Edge”, the Agha family tried to overcome the misery of the Israeli operation by gathering in one place. This was not a problem until the Israeli occupation forces targeted their relative and neighbor Zoheer Agha at dawn, four o’clock in the morning, on July 26th. His house was destroyed along with several other houses in the neighborhood including the house of Hanan Agha.

Hanan Warsh Agha, 43, told us her experience in that house during “Operation Protective Edge.” She said: “we were about 21 people, including children and women, all of us gathered in one story. We ran out of the house without carrying a thing. We screamed at each other to evacuate quickly. Then we ran to the street, but when we were only 40 meters away our neighbor’s house, it was bombed with three missiles from a drone, followed by a missile from a warplane. Seeing the house destroyed was very difficult. They were so barbaric to bomb a small house with so many missiles; I felt that the missiles were targeting my own heart.”

She continues, “It was a great tragedy... why have they done that to us? There were only civilians in that house.” Hanan feels sorry that bombing that house caused great damage to the house of their neighbors; the Baba family. This family lost one of their members; many others sustained injuries, ranging from moderate to critical. As Hanan puts it, “we received very short notice before they have bombed the house; as a result, we couldn’t warn the Baba family especially as we were scared and confused.”

Hanan explained, “If we hadn’t received a warning, all of us could have been killed. My house hosted many of our relatives, all of them have evacuated in five minutes.” She describes how “the scene of us getting out the house was scary. Women and children were running away from death; everyone was shouting to each other to run away quickly.”

The house was destroyed and the operation ended, but the feeling of pain and anguish for losing the house remains. Failing to find a new house for the family augments this pain. Family members are no longer together in the same house or neighborhood, and this is not the end of the story.

The Massacre

We lived through harsh days; through fear, terror, devastation, displacement, losing hope of life and the sense of time; through shortage of water and electricity, murder, devastation and pain.

With these words, Yasmeen Bardaa, 28, reflected her daily life during the 2014 Israeli aggression on Gaza.

Yasmeen was very stressed throughout the aggression especially every time bombardment was intensified, she said, "every time that I hear an explosion nearby I would embrace my little son "Hazem"."

As she continued, "after the aggression I have become somebody else; I lost hope in a stable life. Every child, man, and women had broken something inside him or her. I don't think we would be the same persons as before the operation."

As Yasmeen put it, "we were 21 people staying at Mansoura Street in Shijaeya neighborhood. We could not sleep during the nights as we were hearing explosions and sounds of warplanes that did not stop flying over our heads. Even the sounds of the drones, it didn't stop patrolling."

"Every time we heard an explosion, we started to guess the place of the target, and asking if we are going to be next."

She continued, "I can't imagine the life of women and children when an explosion goes off next to them nor the fear and panic they live through. The warplanes did not distinguish between a civilian, child, woman or even an elderly."

"On July 8th 2014, during the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan when Israeli shelling on Shijaeya started, our life have turned upside down. The situation was getting scarier as bombs were randomly hitting houses. Flares were going off all night until six in the morning. My husband and father-in-law decided to get out of the house to another place that might be safer."

"We went out of the house during the first morning hours. We were 21 people including all our neighbors. As we were running in the streets, we did not see anything in front of us because of the intensive bombardment."

"While we were escaping, a shell had exploded nearby and killed and injured many people who were trying to escape through "Mansoura" street. We were very scared and in panic."

"Unconsciously and without thinking, we left all our belongings back at the house. We went to a safer place to take a break of what we had seen and stop thinking of the people who left behind without medical treatment."

"You wouldn't see what had happened to us except in an action movie... a real massacre has been committed against our children and elderly."

Yasmeen's story did not end here, she said, "During a ceasefire, we went back to see our house. Unfortunately, everything has changed. It was a sort of a "Tsunami" went through the area; no trees, no streets and no mosques had stayed intact. When I got into my house, it has become unlivable, they ruined everything including TV, fridge, washer and furniture even our clothes were lost."

"When I saw the degree of destruction to my house, I prayed to God for things to get better. Even my children have cried over their lost toys. My little son "Hazem" asked me once "Why did "Jews" destroy our house? I hate them"."

As winter is getting closer, Bardaa family has started to fix their house. They are patiently waiting for reconstruction projects to start so that their house would be rebuild again.

Me and My Partner; and Death

The scene this time is completely different, and stories carries with it another kind of suffering and pain. Furthermore, history has made us witnesses to an aggression that has intended to cause much pain to the innocents.

On the 26th of Ramadan of the year 2014, at about 7 in the morning, the Israeli occupation forces entered Khozaa Village, east of Khan Younis. The arbitrary shelling started to target trees, stones and innocent people... Fear and death was everywhere.

Shehada Godeeh and his wife Majda, 49, lived in a small humble house for years. They breed poultry and grow seasonal greens in a yard in front of their house. They lived their life as farmers. One day when darkness started to come down, Israeli forces entered the village and started to devastate everything. People started escaping, while Majda and her husband were trying to decide whether they leave or not. At the end, they decided to leave during day light. Majda narrated details of her story, "after we broke our fasting, bombardment had started. We were terrified, so we stayed up all night. In the morning, we heard one of our neighbors screaming "Father... Father... our house had burned down" my husband looked out of the window, and he saw people running out of their houses. So we left the house with my mother. However, I went back to bring some of my belongings. Suddenly, a missile from a drone targeted me and shattered my legs into pieces and shrapnel hit other parts of my body. My husband and a neighbor returned to rescue me. They fixed my leg with a piece of wood and then carried me inside the house. My neighbor left because a missile targeted his house. We heard afterward that he lost his brother and his wife was injured."

On that day, time was passing by slowly for the couple. While the two were hiding out in their house, the Israeli forces were entering nearby houses and turning it upside down. Majda told her husband to wave a white flag so that they

would know that they are inside.

"He went out holding up a white flag. When they saw him, they attacked him; He told them that I was injured. Then, they asked him to get me out of the house immediately or they would shoot both of us. He returned and with his help, I was out in the yard. They asked us to get off our clothes. We begged them to let us stay dressed up, but they did not listen. They lead him one more time to the yard, and interrogated him. They asked him about the number of people in the house and he answered, "Only me and my wife... we don't have children" They started hitting him and accused him of lying and told him, "you have six mattresses in the house." He told him, "it's for the guests" but they did not believe him."

Majda was in the burning sun for several hours while her husband was being interrogated. After returning, he begged for an ambulance for his wife, but they refused. At last, they asked them to stay away from their house and her husband had to carry her again, while she was bleeding and in pain. After few moments, there was a blast in their house. The patrol took their own belongings and left.

Majda continues, "I lost so much blood, my husband actually asked for water but they refused to give it him. Holding a white flag, he walked to another patrol and asked them for water and they gave it to him. For six days, I was going through severe pain; fortunately, we found a cell phone on the ground. We called my brother who is a doctor. He told my husband to put water and salt mixture on the injury. It was already getting worse and ants started to gather all over my body. Until a ceasefire was established, and an ambulance picked us up. Now I sustained injury in my eyes and other parts of my body; and I need more than one operation to be able to walk again."

Majda's injury was critical and was left bleeding for six days; and stayed without clothes in front of them. She stayed alive to tell her story of an army that claim to be humane.

The Silence of Mariam

They deprived her of childhood and of enjoying the simple life and took away her smile. They killed her innocence and turned hope into an obscure future. A tragedy and shock have afflicted "Om Mohammed Almasry" after 15 years of misery and trouble in trying to have children. She did embryo transplantation many times until she had a twin, Mohammed and Maryam. Their mother strived to raise them and protect them. However, her protection was out of her hands, when her daughter has become a victim of the latest Israeli aggression.

A resident of Alnaser neighborhood, "Om Mohammed" said, "my twin were born after four operations of transplantation. After 20 years of struggle, we were a happy family. I loved them so much, and gave them all the protection and care in the world. However, I could not protect Maryam from an Israeli shell."

She continued sadly, "Once I was pregnant and till they were 9, we lived the happiest days of our life. Maryam was an excellent student with a mark of 97%. She enjoyed her school, and her dream was to become a university teacher, until the fourth day of the aggression."

On that day, a shell targeted Maryam and injured her instantly. She said, "the aggression was ruthless as every time. They did not differentiate between old or young, Israeli warplanes considered everyone as a target. When the sun had risen starting the fourth day of the operation, I went ahead with cleaning the house. Maryam was sometimes helping me and other times playing with her toys. Suddenly, a shell exploded next to our house in an empty land. I did not realize that the shelling was getting closer. But one of the shells directly hit my house. There was smoke everywhere and I start yelling looking for Maryam who was drenched in blood."

Mariam, 9, was the only daughter she had. Her mother was about to lose her forever. While her twin brother Mohammed was terrified and crying hard, she found Maryam in a pool of blood. She wished at that moment that Allah save her soul so that she could stand up with her twin brother.

At the Shefa Hospital, many injured children were treated. As shrapnel have broken her skull, Maryam had a bleeding and had to enter the intensive care unit. At the end of her treatment, she was unable to talk or move the left side of her limbs.

"We had waited for children for many years. I made sure to keep Maryam inside the house away from missiles; however, she was hit inside the house while playing with her doll"

The mother was traumatized and in panic as she could not help her only daughter. While little Maryam was bleeding and while she was looking around her, she could not describe what was going inside her head nor what was going to happen next to her.

Mariam suffered broken skull by the shrapnel of a projectile. She went through many operations to remove as many shrapnel as possible. However, she still silent and one could see sadness in her eyes.

Her mother continued, "I want Maryam to play like she used to do. I do not know when exactly she would speak and walk again. I pray to Allah that she get back on her feet and to be fully recovered."

The mother has called for officials, inside Gaza and abroad, to help Maryam to get back her normal life, and play again with her twin brother who misses her every day. She wanted them to return all stolen rights of the people of Palestine, especially children.

The Groom of the Family Left As “A Martyr”

“On the second day of Fatr Eid and around 6 o’clock in the evening, while I was with my two daughter and husband, 3 shells hit my house in Deir Albalah city. The house started to collapse on us. Shortly after, I could barely open my eyes, but when I did, I saw my husband running out with my two years old daughter Rafif. During my escape, and when I reached the third floor of my house, I figured out that I did not bring my young daughter Joury. I went back and brought her. Bullets were chasing us and tanks were in front of us. We ran to my neighbor’s house which is safer. Then we moved my sister-in-law’s house where we stayed there for 3 days.”

Hanady Laqan, 31, a wife and a daughter of 2 beautiful girls, looked pale and calmed. She works as a psychologist. Her actual job is to help people to get over their fears, harsh memories and traumas during Israeli aggressions on Gaza. She would create a beautiful life inside Gazans who have lost hope. She is also from Gaza, but her brother story is different from what she usually hears from people.

“My brother Khalid, 25, is a handsome, loving young man. When he first saw me, he carried my daughters and embraced them. He likes my daughters so much. Khalid, who I raised with my mom, is my little brother and I love him so much. We were actually preparing his wedding before the latest aggression. In fact, we planned it on the 26th of august. When a ceasefire has declared, he said good-bye to me heading to his fiancée house to say goodbye to her brothers, who were about to leave to Egyptians hospitals. They were injured by a missile, which targeted them while doing plumbing works at their house. I looked at him and told him to come back safely. He came back the following day, sat down, ate and talked to me a little and left again.”

The shelling started shortly after Khalid has left. People started to prepare for a very difficult night. The night was coming down slowly and the moon was hiding. While bloodshed was taking place, death was visiting the young and old. Words were begging for the morning rays to come, or for ending their life so that their misery would end.

At about eight in the morning, there was a 3-day ceasefire. Hanady wanted to check on her house but

Khalid told her to stay and not to trust Israel. She told him that she wanted to check on her husband and insisted to see what has happened to her house.

She told her brother, “if I died, forgive me”, he held her head and kissed her cheek; and looked into her eyes and said, “Do the same for me.”

Hanady continued, “once I have arrived to the house, massive shelling started. I heard people running out and yelling in the streets. Then, I went back to my sister-in-law’s house. On Saturday afternoon, 2/8/2014, my brother-in-law came over and asked me to prepare to leave for my family house. I asked him, what for? Have any of my brothers died? He denied and said that he only wants me to check on them. I begged him to tell me what has happened, and finally told me that Khalid was injured and wanted to see all of you. At that moment, I knew that Khalid has left. My husband embraced me and I asked him if Khalid died; he said no.”

“When my brother Atta, 23, came over to pick us up, my sister was with him crying hard. I asked her about Khalid, but she did not answer. Then asked her again, she said that he had died. I hit my legs and started crying. Once I got to my parent’s house, I saw everyone wearing black. At that moment, I knew for sure that he had died, and then I lost consciousness.”

The journey from Deir Albalah to Khan Younis was very dangerous for her sisters, as bombing did not stop. With targeting everything on the way, Hanady preferred staying at her parents’ house and slept throughout the day. On the next day, they brought the martyr’s body to his house. His mother, sisters and fiancée embraced him tightly and then he left with a smile on his face. Hanady stood up and started trilling, she said, “I was trilling very hard, I felt that all my anger went out. I ran to his body and put my cheek over his and whispered to him “I love you Khalid”.”

“He left as if he was a groom” Hanady said in a suffocated voice. Her mother suffered a stroke and her leg and hand were permanently disabled. Hanady was in a difficult situation. After two months, she decided to get back to her work, despite all the tragic stories she hears that reopen her wounds. Nevertheless, she will never forgets her last joke with her brother.”

Has Your Flesh Grown Back... Mom?

At the end of hall of the third floor of the Military Hospital in Jordan, a group of nurses wearing a blue and white tied military uniform sat on a desk. Once I got there, I asked for victims of the last war in Gaza. They lead me to a room with a window that allow much sun to get it. Once I got there, there was unusual smell inside the room; one does not expect such a smell in a hospital. I found three women eating. I asked them "Are you the wounded from Gaza." While still chewing food, one of the young women answered: "Yes, we are the victims" I came closer and said, "I am from Gaza and I came to visit you."

They turned to me and the same woman asked me after stopping eating "Are you from Gaza? Did you come from there or you live here?" I answered, "Yes from Gaza, I came couple of days ago". Looking at each other, their eyes were confused, excited and hesitated.

In her forties and a mother of five, Heba Zagout was sleeping on a bed designated for Gaza wounded in the Medical City in Amman. She has sustained difficult injuries in her legs, and the rest of her body has been healing for about two months now.

She started narrating the details of the 27th of Ramadan in the year 2014 in the afternoon, "when my husband went to Friday prayer, things were sort of quite. I gave my children a bath and then went to wash for prayer. Once I started my shower, I felt something is pulling me, I thought I had an electric shock. As I opened my eyes, I started seeing rubble, my blood and dislocated flesh from my almost amputated right leg."

With pain aching throughout her body, she tried hard not to cry and she continued, "it was an arbitrary shelling. I yelled at my children to get out of the room, but while I was yelling, another shell exploded instantly. Shrapnel has injured my kids slightly. I was aware of everything around me, and felt losing my other leg. I took hold of myself, all what I cared about at that time was my children. I started shouting as loud as I could "get out, get out". My youngest son Ahmed, a year and a half, and my other children went out and

the third shell exploded bringing the bathroom down. I injured my back and hands, and sustained broken bones. I looked for something to cover myself with, I found a sheet and covered my body with it; and then I lost consciousness."

People came to save her while she was in the middle of the rubble in her house in Nusairat refugee camp. Her flesh scattered around and her blood spilled all over the place; and her feet has lost shape. As they could not properly carry her out, they waited for the ambulance to come. She stayed in the operation room for 7 hours at Aqsa Martyrs hospital to save her life. She received 12 units of blood and stayed in the Intensive Care Room for 4 days.

She continued, "I woke up on the second day of my injury. One of the nurses asked me to drink water, but I refused. I told him that I am fasting. The next time when I woke up, there was my mother who I have asked about my kids. She told me that they were ok and then went back to sleep again."

A medical team from the Red Cross has evaluated her condition and thought that Gaza hospitals are not ready for her treatment. They send her to a Military Hospital in Jordan. She misses Gaza a lot especially her little son Ahmed. Her other children, Haya, Shaza, Abdallah and Mohamed would ask her over the phone if her flesh has regrown. She would stop talking to them, because she does not want to remember the past difficult days and how much she misses them.

Heba Zagout is a strong woman, and insists to get back to her country; and to her husband and children who are eagerly waiting for her.

I talked to her for more than an hour, during that time, she insisted to not cry or be weak. However, when I asked her "who do you miss most?" she laid back and started sobbing along with her mother who accompanies her, she said with a weak voice, "for my children and husband."



I Buried My Son's Amputated Limb With My Own Hands

One cannot imagine the dramatic stories that took place in the Shijaeya neighborhood during the latest Israeli operation against Gaza. It brings back the difficult stories of the 1948 Nakba, 60 years old. This is a story of a woman who strived to bring up her son, but after 18 years of a struggle and in one instant, he lost one of his legs during the Shijaeya massacre.

Ahlam Abukass "Om Ali," 50, never before felt the aching pain like the one she felt over seeing her son Ali, 18 years old, drenched with blood in the hospital. His leg was amputated; the other one was injured badly during the Shijaeya massacre that took place near the local market.

She said, "few months after our marriage (I was 16 years old then) my husband was jailed for 13 years in prison. I carried the burdens of his absence until he was released from prison after spending his term."

The couple were happy when they were blessed with their son Ali who refilled their life with joy. She dedicated her life for him until he was a grown man.

It is so difficult to lose a person one loves. But it is worse to lose the meaning of life. Abukass told us that the latest aggression caused her a lot of pain, especially after she and her family left their house for a shelter -school- in the Eldaraj neighborhood, where she was faced with a terrifying experience.

She narrated. "My son Ali went to bring us water because there wasn't any in the shelter. There was an explosion close to where he went. I saw dead bodies of children and young men everywhere. After not coming back for hours, I was worried for Ali. I learned afterward that he went to save others and got injured by another explosion."

"Some said he got killed, others said that he had lost consciousness. I cried out as loud as I could: no Ali did not die. I did not know what had happened and I lost consciousness."

She continued: "I raised Ali to be a loving person and taught him everything until he was in secondary school. He also memorized the Quran."

"When he got injured," she explained, "Ali crawled under a nearby tree and hid underneath it for hours. While he was bleeding, a journalist came by and told him he would come back for him after he would take pictures of the massacre. But the journalist did not come back and Ali kept bleeding until he lost consciousness. Once found, he was transferred immediately to Shefa Hospital in Gaza and then to hospitals in Egypt, for he had sustained critical injuries."

With bitterness in her voice, she said, "I carried my son's amputated leg with my own hands and then buried it in an Egyptian cemetery. I can hardly sleep since this has happened. May Allah compensate him for what has been lost."

I am Still A Bride

Afnan lived her first 17 years in life in a small refugee camp in northern of Gaza Strip. During that period, she has smiled to what seemed funny, played games and never cared for the details of the universe around her. All what she knew about happiness was the warmth of a family and a small humble house where all houses around it looked the same. She left the house as a grown girl wearing a white dress and heading to her husband's, Abdallah Daher, house in Shijaeya neighborhood in Gaza.

In the Omari Mosque, which had become a shelter for residents of Shijaeya, she was sitting on a mattress and leaning her back on one of the pillars of the mosque. A young man was holding her hand, while her green eyes were holding back tears. She was wearing a fashionable black abaya and a shiny wedding ring in her hand. I came close to her and asked her about her story, she explained with a smile on her face, "I got married two months ago. But, one night, on the third of august when the shelling of Shijaeya had intensified, we left town to take refuge at a safer place. It was a terrifying night. We, unfortunately, left without taking any of our belongings. Then, we went to a shelter – School- but it was crowded with refugees. I needed a quitter place, so my husband brought me here when we heard the mosque is open for refugees. I need to get back to my house; to the toys that my mother had brought me."

She burst into tears and said with a suffocated voice, while her husband tighten his grasping hand and wiped her tears and said to her, "we will return and you will have your things back. The house will be undamaged."

She looked at him saying, "how can it be all right and it has been shelled." The young man could not give her an answer. She continued, "my father's house was hit during the 2008 offensive. My mom was so sad, after a while, she succumbed to cancer. She used to spoil me by bringing toys for me. When I was engaged to Abdallah she made me a doll and told me to give it to the first girl I would have. Sadly, she could not see this day and she left shortly before my wedding day. Death has taking the most beautiful thing in my life. Now, they took her from me again. I need my things back... my memories of her."

The conversation went hard on her and she started mumbling. Her husband went closer to her as she put her head on her knees. Raising her head, he told her, "didn't you had enough? Will crying be a solution? You must be strong!"

She still a fragile child who needs her mother to embrace her tightly. She wanted to run away from fear by going to her mother. When I asked her about her husband. She said smiling, "he will come with me". They exchanged a look and asked him, "will you come with me?"

He looked down then told her in a low voice, "I will go wherever you go, just don't think about death. You must know that we will relive our life with our future children. We will pass these difficult days."

Targeting Mona's House

At the beginning of the Israeli "Operation Protective Edge," Mona Awad El Looh, 42, was sheltering many neighbors and relatives in her house. The house is located in Beit Lahia; far from the Israeli borders. They thought it was a safe place during the military operation. She lived through very difficult times during the Operation. But it got worse when, on August 2nd, while in the house, she heard people calling her and her relatives to get out of the house immediately because Israeli warplanes were about to bomb it. As Mona put it, "my oldest son was sleeping on the second floor and I couldn't go up and wake him up. At last, after people kept calling him, he woke up and ran out with us. We did not have time to put on our shoes, as our only goal was to get out quickly and stay alive by avoiding the shrapnel of the missile."

The house was bombed without a warning. First, a drone missile targeted the house's roof; after few minutes, an F16 warplane bombed it completely. She said, "At the beginning, I thought that the first missile had hit my house by mistake, but when many larger missiles started to hammer my house, I was in a shock. I was very close when it started to collapse as one piece. I couldn't recognize the voices around me. There was the sound of the house collapsing, children crying and people around me screaming for help."

She continued with tears in her eyes, "there isn't any clear reason for targeting my house. All of us in the house were civilians without any political affiliations; my husband works as an inspector at the Palestinian Ministry of Health and is not involved with any sort of political activism."

Mona added, "we were still paying for the furniture and completing our house; my husband is in so much debt, which he pays off with his small salary." Mona and her family who are living in a tragic condition where proper clothes and essential household items remain lacking. All of this hinders the family from living a normal life.



Lost Among the Rubble

During “Protective Edge” operation, living away from the borders in Beit Lahia, made Subhya Khalil El Baba, 63, feel secure and not expect any bad things happen to her family. However, without any mercy and during harsh moments that she will never forget, she lost her son after bombing her house and her neighbor’s. Subhya started, “at the beginning of the aggression, my daughter came from Shijaeya to take refuge at my house. We were 25 people in the house living through very difficult times.” They gathered in a small place, including the children who were terrified by the sounds of explosions around them. However, without pre-warning the Israeli planes hit their neighbor’s house, Warsh Agha, with several missiles. Subhya’s house was destroyed for its closeness to the targeted house, but sadly, Subhya lost her son Mohammed when a wall collapsed on him, and his corpse was trapped under rubble. In the same incident, eight people from the Baba family were injured.

Subhya continued while still traumatized, “for 15 minutes after the bombing, voices kept yelling for us while we were under rubble. Ashes were everywhere. We were bleeding and suffocating, but what I wanted to do at that moment is to save my son Mohammed from under the rubble, but he was already passed away.”

The ambulances transferred everyone to hospitals and Subhya has sustained a leg injury. She recalled her son Mohammed with tears filled her eyes, “what has happened to us is a crime against all Human Rights laws by killing my son and destroying my house where my family have lived in for 50 years. They took everything beautiful in my life.”

Subhya’s husband still does not believe that Israel has demolished his house. He visits it every day and looks sadly to every piece of what has left of his most beautiful place he ever had. He talked to it as if he was talking to one of his children about his painful life and dreams of rebuilding his house.







Women Pay the Price of the Aggression

Report about Impacts of Israeli Violations on Women
During the Israeli Aggression on the Gaza Strip from July 7 until August 26, 2014

Introduction

Military forces of the Israeli Occupation launched an extensive aggression on the Gaza Strip on July 7, 2014, and it continued until August 26. The aggression was unprecedented in its brutality, level of bloodshed, and its disastrous humanitarian impacts on the civilian population; the impacts that lasted until the release of this report.

The last aggression was the third one in the past 6 years, and it took place after more than 7 years of the imposition of tight siege on the Gaza Strip, which led to a deterioration in the humanitarian as well as human rights conditions, given the international community's failure to fulfill its previous promises to reconstruct the destruction of the consecutive Israeli assaults. This had had dramatic implications on the corrosion of the humanitarian as well as human rights conditions, particularly health care services, mainly hospital services, as well as water and sanitation sector..... Etc.

It is noteworthy that the Occupation forces had staged a comprehensive aggression, "Cast Lead Operation,"¹ on Gaza Strip on Saturday, December 27, 2008. It lasted 22 days, causing the deaths of over than 1400 Palestinians, including about 111 women. It also initiated an aggression called "Pillar of Cloud"² on Wednesday, November 14, 2012 by assassinating the military commander of Hamas, Ahmed Aljaabary. The aggression continued for 8 days, causing the deaths of over than 171 Palestinians, including 13 women.

Since the early days, field facts of the aggression revealed the extent to which the occupation forces did not abide by its obligations to the rules of the International Humanitarian Law as well as the International Law for Human Rights, as it had committed obvious war crimes throughout this assault.

The thing that manifested through the practices of these forces, which were vivid as well as systemized violations to the rules of the International Humanitarian Law, particularly articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention, governing the conduct of occupation forces towards the population in the occupied land, and laying down rules that regulate the use of power during armed conflicts.

Occupation forces directly targeted civilians with the intention to cause the largest number of deaths and injuries among them. In addition, facts and data showed that these forces had targeted residential houses in a systematic manner; that is, they bombed these houses while residents were still inside. They also deliberately bombed civilians as they were fleeing their houses and residential areas upon being raided.

Additionally, the Israeli forces targeted those forcibly displaced from their houses and into shelters which were merely schools, parks, or hospital yards, and which lacked the minimum decent living conditions for people.

The aggression transformed all segments and social classes into victims of violations for a set of human rights during as well as after the assault. However, women were the segment most affected by the Israeli crimes committed during the assault which impacts will haunt them for many years to come not only due to the obstruction of reconstruction or achieving justice, but also due to the magnitude of the traumas these women underwent as well as the enormous stress they are still toiling under.

The effects and severe implications appear on women in various aspects; the implications are not limited to the direct damages which women suffered from similarly to men and children, for in the Palestinian society the woman is considered the backbone of the family, and most often the life of the family depends greatly on the social roles played by the women in this family.

In addition, the Palestinian society in general, and the Gazan in particular are characterized by their

1 See statistical report about Cast Lead Assault on the following link: [http://www.mezan.org/ar/details.php?id=8839&ddname=Gaza destruction&id_dept=22&id2=9&p=center](http://www.mezan.org/ar/details.php?id=8839&ddname=Gaza%20destruction&id_dept=22&id2=9&p=center)

2 See statistical report issued by Al Mezan Center about Pillar of Cloud Assault on the following link http://www.mezan.org/ar/details.php?id=16480&ddname=IOF&id_dept=22&id2=9&p=center

conservative culture. Women's suffering has reached its peak during and after the last assault; after the families' displacement, women continued their desperate attempts to maintain the unity of their families. As a result, women lost the simplest form of their privacy for they have to share along with their families the floor of a classroom in a school with one or more families. They could not take off their scarves even while they were asleep; moreover, they are severely embarrassed when they line up in a queue so as to use the bathroom in all times.

These women have suffered the horrors of the attacks launched on their houses, and some of them might have witnessed the death of their husbands and one or most of their children. However, they are compelled to be strong so as to comfort their children and lessen the impacts of the trauma on them. These women are under extreme stress as they are required to take care of family life matters in light of the severe shortage in all elements of the humane life, as there are no clothes or blankets, as well as no means to do laundry or clean personal clothes due to water cut. Yet, women do play this role.

It is true that every time women have proven to be stronger and more enduring; conversely, it is also true that such high stress and severe brutality leave a profound psychological impact that could haunt women for the rest of their lives; an impact that is harsher on women than men owing to the women's varied roles and burdens towards the family during as well as after the aggression.

This report attempts to display the violations committed against women during the previous aggression on the Gaza Strip in addition to the vast humanitarian effects that burden the Palestinian women in the Gaza Strip, based on the tremendous amount of data collected by female researchers and journalists represented in (300) stories that narrate aspects of women's hardship owing to violations they were subjected to during the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip.

The report opens with a legal background that serves as an introduction to understanding the nature of the occupation forces conduct, and the extent of its compliance with or violation to the articles of the International Humanitarian Law. Thus, it lists the primary principles of the International Humanitarian Law. It also reviews articles from the Fourth Geneva Convention which forbid the targeting of civilians, their properties, and their houses, and provide special protection for women and children within the context of general protection of civilians and civilian objects.

The report lists the most prominent forms of violations committed by the occupation forces, as well as the implications of such violations on women in particular. Therefore, it begins by tackling the crimes of killing women and injuring them, the impacts of these crimes on the family in general, and the woman in particular, in addition to the stance of the International Humanitarian Law on these crimes.

Then it moves to addressing the crime of using women as human shields; these forces deliberately endanger the lives of women by pushing them in front of the soldiers, and forcing them to enter the houses before the soldiers themselves in order to verify the absence of any threat that might risk the lives of these soldiers.

The report sheds light on another crime that women have suffered from its cruelty, and which had severe impacts on them; namely the murder of their children or husbands, especially when children are murdered or their bodies are torn into pieces right before their mothers' eyes, or when their husbands are murdered. The latter crime adds other forms of social as well as economical suffering to the mammoth mental suffering in light of the ruthless culture of the patriarchal society that puts the fate of the bereaved woman at risk, doubling her humanitarian suffering.

The report also tackles the crime of murdering fetuses in the wombs of their mothers as a result of the physical and psychological pressure they underwent due to intense fear or running for long distances in their attempts to escape the hell of bombardment. Therefore, pregnant women lost their fetuses due to severe, life-threatening bleeding that not only affected their health, but also had deep psychological implications.

Moreover, the report addresses the crimes of demolition and destruction of the houses which targeted entire families. These crimes resulted in the forcible displacement of women, which, in turn, resulted in extreme suffering for these women in terms of loss of privacy and affront to their humane dignity in light of the absence of the minimum decent living conditions at the shelters that were opened to house the forcibly displaced.

The report does not overlook the psychological impacts of the Israeli violations on women, and therefore, indicates that mothers have shown signs of increased psychosomatic disorders (somatization), anxiety of fear (Phobia), digestive disorders, as well as neuroticism.

This report comes within the framework of the great efforts of Women's Affairs Center in its struggle to protect women, and reinforce the respect to their rights in the Palestinian occupied territories through exposing the crimes and violations committed by the Israeli occupation forces, particularly those that women suffered from the utmost, and enhancing regional and international solidarity with the struggles of the Palestinian woman in her battle for survival, her battle for liberation and independence, as well as her battle for equality and freedom.

Legal Background

Armed conflicts are as old as humankind itself. Throughout history, humans could never guarantee that wars or conflicts would not happen. And therefore, there have always been customary practices in war, but only in the last 150 years have States made international rules to limit the effects of armed conflict for humanitarian reasons. This sprang from lessons taken throughout history_ that civilians, particularly women, and children are the ones who pay the heaviest price of these wars even though they are not a party. The Geneva Conventions are the main examples. Usually called International Humanitarian Law (IHL), it is also known as the law of war or the law of armed conflict.

The IHL, as we know, was not, in fact, established suddenly; it was not even in its present form as a part of the legal rules that control the international relations. This body of humanitarian laws was gradually developed based on different experiences as well as lessons learned from wars across the world. Part of these laws is also owed to the historical humanitarian heritage, including religious teachings or ancient cultural practices that formed the basis for the rules of IHL that governs relations between States.

Geneva Conventions is considered the cornerstone of IHL. The first was signed by 16 countries in 1864. For centuries before then, rules had applied to the conduct of war, but were based on customs and traditions; they were effective only locally or temporarily. In 1864, there was a turning point that led to a fundamental change concerning the legal regulation of armed conflicts; a new process of building a body of law began, and it is still evolving up to the present.³

In the century and a half that followed the body of IHL grew. The Geneva Convention was extended, in 1906 and 1929 so as to improve the conditions of sick and wounded soldiers in the field and to define new rules on the protection of prisoners of war. In 1899 and 1907, the Hague Conventions, mainly aimed at regulating the conduct of warfare, were also adopted. In August 1949, the four Geneva Conventions as we know them today were adopted. This time they also included the protection of civilians, reflecting the terrible experience of World War II.⁴

Protocols were added to the Geneva Conventions in 1977 and 2005 in addition to a range of other international conventions and protocols covering specific areas such as conventional weapons, chemical weapons, landmines, laser weapons, cluster munitions and the protection of children in armed conflicts has developed the reach of IHL. So too has the codification of customary law.⁵

3 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), War and International Humanitarian Law, Overview, published on 29\10\2010 <https://www.icrc.org/ara/war-and-law/overview-war-and-law.htm>

4 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Previous Resource

5 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Previous Resource

As conflicts and their horrors continue, attempts of the International Community to provide more protection, guarantees, and mechanisms to enhance the protection of civilians continue through promoting participation, creating more mechanisms of monitoring and control so as to reinforce the ability to end conflicts and diminish their implications as well as build peace.

Thus, UN Security Council Resolutions about the protection of children during armed conflicts as well as the protection of women and involving them the peace-building processes were adopted, such as UN Resolution No. 1612 and 1325 in 2000. The latter was followed by a series of resolutions that are of no less importance due to their ability to create mechanisms that could reflect this resolution on reality; these are: Resolution No. 1820 in 2008, Resolution No. 1888 and 1889 in 2009, and Resolution No. 1960 in 2010.

These resolutions are significant as they lay the foundation for more mechanisms of monitoring and documenting as well as report writing regarding the obligations of the United Nations, namely the Secretary-General, and the States so as to respect Resolution No. 1325 on the involvement of women in the peace-building process, and the monitoring of violations against women during armed conflicts.

In order to ensure that civilians are spared the horrors of wars, there are basic rules that create guarantees to protect civilians, and restrict the use of force by the combatants. The most important rules are listed as follows:

The Notion of Necessity⁶

A dominant notion within the framework of IHL is military necessity, often the principle which clashes most with humanitarian protection. Military necessity permits armed forces to engage in conduct that will result in destruction and harm being inflicted. The concept of military necessity acknowledges that under the laws of war, winning the war or battle is a legitimate consideration.

However, the concept of military necessity does not give the armed forces the freedom to ignore humanitarian considerations altogether and do what they want. It must be interpreted in the context of specific prohibitions and in accordance with the other principles of IHL.

It is important to note that the notion itself is to be found within the rules of IHL. For example, Article 52 of Additional Protocol I lists those objects that can be subject to lawful attacks. The notion cannot be applied to override specific protections, or create exceptions to rules where the text itself does not provide for one.

Principles of Distinction and Proportionality⁷

Principle of precaution governs the legal use of force in an armed conflict, whereby belligerents must distinguish between combatants and civilians. Distinction and proportionality are important factors in assessing military necessity in that the harm caused to civilians or civilian property must be proportional and not excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated by an attack on a military objective. The principles arguably impose an obligation on states to choose less harmful means to achieve their military aim. It ensures respect for and protection of civilian population and civilian objects. Operations that are directed against anything other than military objectives will violate the principle of distinction.

The principle of distinction underpinning many rules of IHL is that only fighters may be directly targeted. This is a necessary compromise that IHL provides for in order to protect civilians in armed conflict. Without the principle of distinction, they would be no limitation on the methods of warfare.

The specific rules where the principle of distinction is set out concerns Article 48 and 52 of Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions. This defines who is a combatant and a military object that can be lawfully attacked. Any direct attack against a civilian or civilian object is not only a violation of IHL but also a grave breach. Direct

6 International Humanitarian Law Series No. 2, Basic Principles of International Humanitarian Law, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 2008 <http://www.mezan.org/upload/8791.pdf>

7 Same Previous Resource

attacks against civilians and/or civilian objects are categorized as war crimes. Additionally, any weapon which is incapable of distinguishing between civilians/civilian objects and fighters/military objects is also prohibited under IHL. The principle is also a rule of customary international law, binding on all states.

The principle of proportionality

The principle of proportionality limits and protects potential harm to civilians by demanding that the least amount of harm is caused to civilians, and when harm to civilians must occur it needs be proportional to the military advantage. The article where proportionality is most prevalent is in Article 51(5) (b) of API concerning the conduct of hostilities which prohibits attacks when the civilian harm would be excessive in relation to the military advantage sought. This is an area of hostilities where we often hear the term 'collateral damage'.

The principle cannot be applied to override specific protections, or create exceptions to rules where the text itself does not provide for one. As with the principle of necessity, the principle of proportionality itself is to be found within the rules of IHL themselves. For example, direct attacks against civilians are prohibited and hence a proportionality assessment is not a relevant legal assessment as any direct attack against even a single civilian who is not taking part in hostilities is a clear violation of IHL. Proportionality is only applied when a strike is made against a lawful military target.

The opinion of the International Court of Justice in regards to the Apartheid Wall which Israel is building on the Palestinian Territories in the West Bank halted any assumptions; its take was decisive. It stated that the Palestinian territory is indeed an occupied land, and that the Fourth Geneva Convention applies on the occupied Palestinian territory, which should be honored by the Israeli Authorities.⁸

The report displays some Provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention⁹ that demonstrate the applicability of the treaty on the state of military occupation and armed conflicts of international and non-international characters, commitments and obligations of the parties, general protection of civilian population, property and objects, as well as the legal obligations of the High Contracting Parties towards the violations committed by other parties.

Article (1) The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances.¹⁰

Article (2) In addition to the provisions which shall be implemented in peacetime, the present Convention shall apply to all cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them.

The Convention shall also apply to all cases of partial or total occupation of the territory of a High Contracting Party, even if the said occupation meets with no armed resistance.

Article (4) Persons protected by the Convention are those who, at a given moment and in any manner whatsoever, find themselves, in case of a conflict or occupation, in the hands of a Party to the conflict or Occupying Power

8 On Friday 09\07\2004, International Court of Justice issued its advisory opinion regarding the legality of the establishment of the apartheid wall on the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank by the Israeli Occupation.

9 Fourth Geneva Convention regarding the protection of civilian persons at times of war, dated August 12, 1949

10 It should be noted here that this article lays responsibility on all parties to ensure respect for the Convention and the fulfillment of obligations towards the accountability and prosecution, including violations committed by other countries, in the sense that any signatory is obliged to pursue all officials suspected of committing serious violations once they step foot on its territories. It is in addition to Article 146 which is the basis of origin of international jurisdiction, used by Palestinian human rights organizations as a basis for litigation against political and military leaders in the State of occupation and against companies that supply the occupation forces with heavy equipment and weapons.

of which they are not nationals.

Article (17) The Parties to the conflict shall endeavor to conclude local agreements for the removal from besieged or encircled areas, of wounded, sick, infirm, and aged persons, children and maternity cases, and for the passage of ministers of all religions, medical personnel and medical equipment on their way to such areas.

Article (27) Protected persons are entitled, in all circumstances, to respect for their persons, their honor, their family rights, their religious convictions and practices, and their manners and customs. They shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof and against insults and public curiosity.

Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honor, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.

Without prejudice to the provisions relating to their state of health, age and sex, all protected persons shall be treated with the same consideration by the Party to the conflict in whose power they are, without any adverse distinction based, in particular, on race, religion or political opinion. However, the Parties to the conflict may take such measures of control and security in regard to protected persons as may be necessary as a result of the war.

Article (28) The presence of a protected person may not be used to render certain points or areas immune from military operations.

Article (32) The High Contracting Parties specifically agree that each of them is prohibited from taking any measure of such a character as to cause the physical suffering or extermination of protected persons in their hands. This prohibition applies not only to murder, torture, corporal punishment, mutilation and medical or scientific experiments not necessitated by the medical treatment of a protected person, but also to any other measures of brutality whether applied by civilian or military agents.

Article (33) No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited. Pillage is prohibited. Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited.

Article (49) Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive.

Nevertheless, the Occupying Power may undertake total or partial evacuation of a given area if the security of the population or imperative military reasons so demand. Such evacuations may not involve the displacement of protected persons outside the bounds of the occupied territory except when for material reasons it is impossible to avoid such displacement. Persons thus evacuated shall be transferred back to their homes as soon as hostilities in the area in question have ceased.

The Occupying Power undertaking such transfers or evacuations shall ensure, to the greatest practicable extent that proper accommodation is provided to receive the protected persons that the removals are effected in satisfactory conditions of hygiene, health, safety and nutrition, and that members of the same family are not separated.

The Protecting Power shall be informed of any transfers and evacuations as soon as they have taken place.

The Occupying Power shall not detain protected persons in an area particularly exposed to the dangers of war unless the security of the population or imperative military reasons so demand.

The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.

Article (53) Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons, or to the State, or to other public authorities, or to social or cooperative organizations, is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations.

The High Contracting Parties undertake to enact any legislation necessary to provide effective penal sanctions for persons committing, or ordering to be committed, any of the grave breaches of the present Convention defined in the following Article.

Each High Contracting Party shall be under the obligation to search for persons alleged to have committed, or to have ordered to be committed, such grave breaches, and shall bring such persons, regardless of their nationality, before its own courts. It may also, if it prefers, and in accordance with the provisions of its own legislation, hand such persons over for trial to another High Contracting Party concerned, provided such High Contracting Party has made out a 'prima facie' case.

Each High Contracting Party shall take measures necessary for the suppression of all acts contrary to the provisions of the present Convention other than the grave breaches defined in the following Article.

In all circumstances, the accused persons shall benefit by safeguards of proper trial and defense, which shall not be less favorable than those provided by Article 105 and those following of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of August 12, 1949.

Article (147) Grave breaches to which the preceding Article relates shall be those involving any of the following acts, if committed against persons or property protected by the present Convention: willful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments, willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement of a protected person, compelling a protected person to serve in the forces of a hostile Power, or willfully depriving a protected person of the rights of fair and regular trial prescribed in the present Convention, taking of hostages and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly.

It is also worth referring to Article (14) of the Second Additional Protocol of Geneva Convention¹¹ held on August 12th, 1949 which states: starvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited. It is therefore prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless, for that purpose, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works.

Violations against Women during the Assault

During the recent aggression on Gaza, the occupation forces committed a mass of violations against women as they deliberately targeted civilians, properties, as well as other civilians objects; violations that amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, for they have deliberately bombed civilians inside their houses, causing hundreds of deaths among women and children.

Such violation vividly highlights the deliberate killing of women who were usually inside their homes with their children during the aggression. Furthermore, the occupation forces killed tens of women while they were attempting to save themselves by escaping their neighborhoods that were prone to the violent as well as intense Israeli attacks.

11 Adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by the Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation of International Humanitarian Law applicable in armed conflicts and its development. Dated: June 8, 1977. Entry into force: 7 December, 1978, according to the provisions of Article 23.

Besides, the occupation forces used civilians and women as human shields, and thereby endangered these women's lives in addition to terrifying them.

Targeting residential houses by bombardment and destruction is considered as the most prominent violation committed by the occupation forces. Furthermore, the occupation forces, in an unprecedented escalation, targeted residential buildings that included hundreds of apartments. This led to the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians. It also overburdened women who were the victims in all cases, as they were forced to leave their houses under the threat and shelling; in addition, they were obliged to play their roles as if nothing has changed.

What is more, although these women were terrified, comforting their children was still their duty. The shelling and destruction did not stop at the houses, but rather targeted most facilities and other civilian objects such as business and industrial facilities, agricultural lands, Non-Governmental Organizations, religious buildings, hospitals, and health centers.

Occupation forces deliberately hindered and prevented ambulance crews and fire department from accessing the targeted areas or the injured and martyred by imposing a curfew via shooting at a wide range of residential areas. This not only prevented the movement of civilians, but also deterred ambulance crews and other humanitarian teams from accessing these areas, such as Al Shujaya Neighborhood in Gaza City, Beit Hanoun Town, Khuza'a Town, and Alzenh Neighborhood of Abbassan Town in the eastern area of Khan Younis and the eastern region of Rafah City.

Through the statements of their officials, the occupation authorities confessed to using Hannibal Tactic following the announcement of the disappearance of an Israeli soldier in the eastern region of Rafah City. Thus, they opened fire from land, air, and sea in a random, intensive, and heavy bombardment targeting east of Rafah. Meanwhile, facts indicate that they have used the Dahiya Doctrine in Al Shujaya Neighborhood, where arbitrary and intense shelling that aimed at eliminating entire residential compounds was used.

The deliberate targeting of the indispensable resources for the lives of the residents formed a huge source of humanitarian suffering, and in some cases forced hundreds of families to leave their houses despite the fact that their areas were not exposed to direct bombardment.

The occupation forces deliberately bombed and destroyed the primary water reservoirs that feed houses with water; moreover, they bombed water and electricity supply networks, as well as the only electricity plant in Gaza City, stopping it from operating.¹²

This turned residential houses into living hell as it added new burdens to women who had already been struggling with managing their families' affairs in light of this tragic reality and the forcible displacement of hundreds of civilians.

This report attempts to reveal a score of violations against women in particular during the Israeli assault as follows:

Killing and Injuring Women:

The most prominent contour of the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip was the broad targeting of women and children as well as civilians.

It was noticeable for the observers that houses were deliberately bombed and destroyed on top of their residents, causing an increased number of deaths among women and children despite of their limited movement and mobility during the assault, and their attempt to stay indoors.

¹² These practices constitute a war crime for the attack on sources that are indispensable for the life of the population, especially water resources is prohibited. For more details see article 14 of Additional Protocol II, which is contained in the legal background.

Methods of murder varied from death under the rubble of destroyed houses or inside shelters to death during attempts to escape the areas that were under bombardment so as to escape definite death. Results of the monitoring and documentation joint campaign carried out by human rights organizations showed that number of female Palestinian martyrs is (293), (241) of whom were murdered inside their houses, and (7) inside shelters.¹³ In addition, thousands of women were injured; some of these injuries caused permanent disabilities for these women, and therefore changed their lives, especially in light of living in a poor society that lacks the simplest necessary services, and where all service deteriorate.

A woman who had become disabled cannot resume her life as was; she would need exceptional assistance in addition to providing prosthesis.

Undoubtedly, those who were destined to survive a definite death during the Israeli assault still suffered from deep psychological wounds that would accompany them for their entire life; some lost their fetuses due to extreme fear and mental pressure, or due to running for long distances; some witnessed the murder of their husbands and children. According to Ministry of Health statistics, (2070) were injured during the last Israeli aggression.

It is noteworthy that a lot of families were killed at the shelters following their miraculous escape from their neighborhoods such as Samar Al Halaq and her family.¹⁴

When the assault broke out Samar Al Halaq, 29 years old, was nine-month pregnant. She was expecting her third child. Soon, Samar and her family were forced to leave their house and escape the entire neighborhood under the Israeli bombardment. The family took shelter at their relatives' apartment in midtown of Gaza City. Occupation forces targeted that apartment which housed many members of Al Halaq family. Meanwhile, Samar's husband had just left to buy bread, and before he could go farther from the residential tower, he was brought back by the sound of the explosion to check on his family.

The missile penetrated the apartment's kitchen while the women were preparing Iftar; 8 people of Al Halaq family died, including Samar, her sons Sajy (4 years), and Kinan (5 years). Due to the gravity of the explosion, Sajy's body was glued to his mother's to the extent that doctors were unable to separate the two bodies, and so, they were buried together, along with Samar's fetus. Furthermore, citizens Hany Mohammed Al Halaq, and Suad Mohammed Al Halaq died, and more than 15 other people were injured during that raid.¹⁵

In another case, the deliberate intention to cause death and injuries among women within the general context of targeting civilians becomes apparent. The report lists some excerpts of the story of Al Bakry Family from Beach Camp, as told by the 60-year-old Mrs. Raesa Al Bakry¹⁶ who witnessed this crime. The report

13 Figures are based on the outcome of the joint documentation campaign carried out by four human rights organizations: Al Mezan, the Palestinian Center, Al Haq, and Al Dameer.

14 On Sunday 07/20/2014 Israeli war planes fired three missiles at around 19:20 P.M. on an apartment owned by Hani Mohammed Ahmed Al Halaq (29 years), located on the second floor of Cordoba Tower behind Neama Tower, Rimal neighborhood, West of Gaza City. The bombing resulted in the killing of 11 people, including (3) women, one of whom was Ms. Samar Al Halaq who was pregnant, and (6) children. In total, there were 7 members of Al Halaq family were killed.

15 Journalist Maysaa Azaiza conducted the interview with Samar Al Halaq's husband on Tuesday, 18/11/2015.

16 The interview with the eyewitness, Raseesa Al Baki was conducted by Journalist Heba Keraizem on Saturday 20/09/2014. It was mentioned that on Monday 04/08/2014 Israeli war planes fired a missile at around 10:07 A.M. on Ahmed Kamal Mohamed Al Bakri's house (38 years old) after Israel had announced that a cease fire was in effect. The house which was located to the East of the White Mosque in the Market Street, Beach Camp, West of Gaza City, which a densely populated area with residents and shoppers from the Beach primary market area, was bombed without a prior warning. The house of 200 meters consisted of three floors and was sheltering 4 families, consisting of 30 members, 17 of whom are children. The bombardment destroyed the house entirely, killed Aseel Mohamed Kamal Al Bakri (4 years), and injured 35 people, including 14 children and 8 women. It is noteworthy that huge parts of two adjacent houses that belong to Ayyad and Abu Toha families were destroyed.

summarizes her story as follows:

"We were in the house, preparing breakfast for our young children. I was reassured for truce meant ceasefire even if temporarily. Suddenly and without any prior notice, I heard an explosion, and felt the house collapse over the heads of its occupants."

Raesa's sister-in-law martyred, so did her two daughters, Aseel and Asmaa, as well as her brother Ramadan and his son. The rest of the family members were injured, including the 12-year-old Yasmeen Al Bakry who was burned, and who had a very tough time to get treated at "Adnan Scientific Center for Burns" in Dar Al Shifaa Hospital.

The girl narrates the details prior to the bombardment, as if she wants to confirm to her aunt, who is accompanying her in the hospital, that they were innocent of any deed that could have justified this crime. According to her, her mother was kneading dough, and she, herself, was watching her mother, eager for any requests. She has not stopped shedding tears for those she lost, remembering them in every passing second; in every second a child asks about his mother or his sister.

Even though death may be regarded as the most severe tragedy due to the deep impacts it leaves in the souls of the family members, friends, and even neighbors, it is a tragedy which effects start big, yet fade away gradually.

On the other hand, when a woman is exposed to a serious life-threatening experience that results in a physical disability that would accompany her for the rest of her life, is an experience that includes psychological traumas that are not limited to the trauma of being directly bombed, or witnessing the deaths of her beloved ones, or witnessing the mutilation of their bodies. Rather, it is a tragedy that continues and shadows her for her entire life. This could be an under estimated description of Israa Al Namlah's experience.¹⁷

As the extended family was taking shelter in their house, and since the parents insisted on staying in the house, the children and grandchildren headed towards what they thought to be a safer place. Before the 8 members of the family could reach their destination, they were targeted by a drone missile.

Israa described what happened, saying, "We were running so we could get to a safe place. I remember that before the Israeli drone had launched a missile towards us, I fell on the ground and could not feel my leg. Then, I lost consciousness."

Youssef Al Namlah, his wife Walaa, and his young sister Angham were martyred in that raid on Al Tanour Neighborhood, Rafah, south of Gaza Strip. Moreover, Wael Al Namlah's leg, his wife's both legs, and his 3-year-son's leg were amputated; in addition, the latter lost his right eye as well. His 2-year daughter, Abeer, was burned. As for Israa's brother-in-law and his wife, they had escaped the house, leaving behind the 4-month son, Ahmed, to die.

Being away from her injured children as she was hospitalized at Al Ahli Hospital in Hebron for over a month agonized Israa the most. "My heart was in the Gaza Strip. I used to listen to any local radio station so as to follow all the events there. Every time they spoke of a martyr, I felt my heart would stop, wondering whether I would hear the name of one of my relatives or not."

Israa realizes that her life would never be the same, for pain has taken over her future despite of her young age. She says, "My husband and I were planning to get pregnant within months; however, I do not know now whether giving birth, and raising a baby would be easy and doable without assistance. I wonder whether I would be able to stand easily in the kitchen, and prepare the food for my children."

¹⁷ An interview with Mrs. Israa Al Namlah, wounded during the Israeli aggression, conducted on Thursday 04\09\2014 by Journalist Ibtesam Mahdi.

The deliberate targeting of civilians, and their houses, as well as the premeditation to inflict death and injury among civilians, women, and children are evident war crimes, since they are considered major violations to the articles of the International Law which state that all conflicting parties must distinguish between civilian and military targets, and prohibit the deliberate bombing to civilians and civilian facilities. They are also regarded as grave and systematic violations to articles: 32, 33, 53, and 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Using Women as Human Shields:

Using civilians for protection, or in other words, using them as human shields is one of the grave violations committed by the Israeli occupation against the civilian Palestinians¹⁸ in their wide-ranged military operations on the Gaza Strip which were staged three times in the past 6 years. Additionally, it was also used dozens of times during the Second Palestinian Intifada in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Using civilians as human shields is a term that refers to the practice in which soldiers use civilians to prevent being attacked by members of the resistance who usually refrain from targeting the soldiers when they see civilians at the forefront. Over the years, such practice took various forms, such as:

Binding children to the front of the military vehicle, forcing civilians to go inside locations suspected to be used by members of the resistance or to places suspected to be booby trapped with explosives, forcing civilians to accompany them as they proceeded on foot, or detaining them inside houses that they use as a location to fire in order to prevent being targeted by rockets.

One of the many crimes the occupation forces committed during their last aggression on the Gaza Strip was taking protection behind civilians and using them as human shields. Reports of Palestinian Human Rights Organizations documented 13 cases of using civilian human shields, one of which was Mrs. Mariam Awad Saleem Abu Mughseeb, 60 years old. She lives in Wadi Al Salqa village, Southeast of Deir Al Balah City, and her house is about 1500 meters away from the eastern border of the Gaza Strip. Israeli soldiers used her as human shield to protect themselves.

With the beginning of the ground invasion that took place in the eastern border area along the Gaza Strip, the 60 year old widow, Abu Mughseeb, left her house to one of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) schools to the west of the city along with her family to escape the indiscriminate artillery shelling that targeted their area.

She stayed several days at the school, and when she heard that the first truce was in effect, she got on a cart dragged by a donkey, and went hurriedly to check on her house and feed the animals she had left behind.

Before she could reach the front door, the occupation soldiers took her by surprise, announcing the beginning of a journey of suffering and torment that put her life at risk; she had to undergo a humiliating inspection by male recruits rather than female recruits, and they took her purse and cell phone away. Then, Abu Mughseeb was taken inside, handcuffed, and blindfolded. After she was interrogated, she was locked in a room. The soldiers told her that she would be released shortly.

Pain started to crawl to her bound hands; her old age does not allow her to sit lengthily in the same position while bound. Thus, she started crying, and instead of showing her clemency, her suffering began when the soldiers took her to her relatives' house.

They made her walk in front of them, and then forced her to enter the houses before them. They used to enter only when they would be assured that no one was inside these houses, similarly to the internal rooms of the houses. So, they moved around, taking cover behind her as she was dying of fear in each time she went from one house to another.

After searching 3 houses, they re-questioned her; this time, they asked her about the resistance fighters, tunnels, and places where they hide, in addition to loads of other questions. Despite of their determination, she gave only one answer, "I do not know", for she really did not know.

Besides being extremely scared, she was tense and worried about her family who lost contact with her after

18 An interview with eyewitness Mrs. Mariam Abu Meghseeb conducted by Journalist Ibtesam Mahdi on Tuesday 02\09\2014.



the Israeli soldiers had taken her cell phone. They took her back to her house, and, in the next day, forced her to inspect another house in the street where she lived. This time, the door was locked, so they broke it down with a bulldozer, and then forced her to go inside and search the place in order to ensure there were no resistance fights inside.

The same situation was repeated in another house before she was taken back to her house. She was left in a room facing the western region that was close to the theater of operation of the resistance. Thus, in case of any assault by the resistance, she would have been in the front line, and would have been the first to be injured or even maybe get killed.

"They told me I would accompany them for 8 days during which they would remain in the neighborhood."

At the end of the third day, she was told by who seemed to be the leader of the force that their mission in the area had finished, and that she would be released in the early morning of the following day. Afterwards, the soldiers left the house.

She adds, "Fear took over my feelings; these were the most difficult moments. I was scared that bulldozers would demolish the house on top of my head or that I would be killed by one of the soldiers. I blew out the candles that I had lit in the house, closed the door, and hid under the bed." She, then, began to hear the roar of the tanks, and the heavy gunfire accompanying their withdrawal from the neighborhood.

At dawn, Abu Mughseeb decided to leave the house; she did so imbued with fear. She arrived at her sister's house at the end of the street, and sat there. She called her relatives using her cell phone which the occupation forces had returned to her. As she had predicted, her family had held a funeral for her, believing she had been killed.

Using civilians as human shields is considered as a serious violation to the rules of the International Law since it is a behavior that leads to the severe endangerment to the lives of civilians as well as intimidating them. It is a form of arbitrary punishment based on racial discrimination which is manifested in using a woman as a human shield just for no other reason except that she is a Palestinian Arab, rather than because she had committed any offense. Such behavior contradicts the core of the International Humanitarian Law as well as the articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention, namely Article (28) which prohibits using civilians for protection in addition to Articles (4, 27, and 33). This practice is also a violation to the provisions and decrees of the Israeli Supreme Court which prohibited this conduct.¹⁹

Killing Husbands and Children and Its Impact on Women:

The Israeli Occupation Forces intentionally targeted civilians and their properties, and their raids caused hundreds of deaths among civilians. When talking about the killing of civilians, the effect is significant because we are talking about losing a life; a life that means a lot, and which goes beyond being a number added to the rates of deaths; a life that is, rather, a mass of feelings and emotions, and of relationships and memories. For instance, the loss of a child means a great pain primarily for his/her family, and then extends to all his/her relatives and acquaintances.

The impact of the loss varies even among the members of the same family; most often the mother suffers from the most intense psychological impact, since she was the one to carry her child inside of her, breastfeed her child, stay up the night in sicknesses, and to exert unimaginable efforts to educate, raise, and reform her child's behavior. Even though the mother suffers the most from the loss, she, unfortunately, undertakes the task of alleviating the trauma of the loss on her sons and daughters.

Not only she is forced to fill the void that is left by the loss of the husband, but her burdens are multiplied; she becomes in charge of maintaining the stability of the family as well as ensuring the source of financial support to find herself facing a new challenge under extremely cruel psychological, social, and economic conditions.

¹⁹ For further details about the using civilians for protection see the report issued by the Al Mezan Center and updated on 2009 on the link: http://www.mezan.org/ar/details.php?id=9202&ddname=Crimes&id_dept=22&id2=9&p=center

According to the findings of the joint monitoring and documenting work conducted by Human Rights Organizations, the number of children killed due to the Israeli assault has amounted to (556) including (191) females, and the number of the married men killed during the aggression is (792) which demonstrates the number of women who lost their husbands.²⁰

How could a person even imagine the suffering of a mother who made great efforts to get pregnant, and after 20 years of marriage, she was blessed with a child that filled her life with joy, yet this child was abruptly killed by the hands of the Israeli war criminals? Can the magnitude of this tragedy, the agony of this loss, and the separation be imagined?!! This is the story of a new tragedy of a woman; a story that will accompany her to death.

The report narrates the story of Um Mahmoud Al Majdalawy²¹ from Beer Al Naaja area, North of Gaza Strip whose only son was killed right in front of her by the Israeli bombardment.

After 20 years of failed attempts, Um Mahmoud's artificial insemination was successful and she gave birth to her son Mahmoud, who was later killed by the Israeli war machine.

On August 3, Mahmoud was still sleeping in his mother's lap when the occupation forces bombed their neighbors' house, and, just in few seconds, the room where the mother and son were sleeping was swarmed with rubble, gunpowder, and smoke.

Um Mahmoud says, "The lower part of my body was covered with rubble, while Mahmoud was buried underneath it; I could only see some of his body limbs. I heard his moans string faintly. I was not able to help him." The heart-broken mother resumes, "Abu Mahmoud removed the rubble off me, and asked me whether I were fine. I did not respond as I was looking at my only child who was struggling with death." The mother and son were taken to the hospital, and as soon as they had arrived, Mahmoud was admitted to the Operation Room. After waiting for a period of time, Doctor Talaat Al Nairab, a relative to Al Majdalawy Family, passed by, so the mother grabbed his hand and asked him, "Is Mahmoud alive?!!"

The doctor looked at her, and when he did not reply, she realized that she had lost her son. However, she could not definitely believe it until she saw his corpse lying in the morgue.

In one of the hundreds hideous crimes, the Israeli occupation forces killed Tahrir Al Selik's two children along with their grandfather in a raid that took them by surprise as they were trying to alleviate their suffering by playing on the roof of their house. Tahrir Al Selk,²² the mother, narrates how her two children and their grandfather were killed by the Israeli bombardment as they were playing on the roof on July 30, 2014. She says, "That day, a humanitarian truce for 4 hours was announced. So, my father-in-law decided to take his grandchildren to the last floor of the house where many toys and swings are available in order to entertain them."

As soon as Abdel Karim Al Selik, the grandfather, and his grandchildren arrived at the roof, the Israeli war planes took them by surprise, turning the fun activity to a bloodbath.

Tahrir says, "It was 5:00 in the afternoon when we heard the explosion, and felt the rocks, dirt and dust falling, as well as the glass of the windows break on top of our heads."

Tahrir, her husband, and her brother-in-law rushed to the place, and before they could realize the crimes left by the first missile, which took the lives of the grandfather, and the grandchildren Ola, Lyian, Lina, Ameena, Abdel Halim, and Abdel Aziz, the occupation forces fired another missile at the same location. Therefore,

20 Figures are based on the outcome of the joint documentation campaign carried out by four human rights organizations: Al Mezan, the Palestinian Center, Al Haq, and Al Dameer

21 Journalist Hala Hellis interviewed eyewitness Um Mahmous Al Majdalawi on Tuesday 09\09\2014. Mrs. Majdalawi showed reluctance regarding publishing her name and personal data.

22 Interview with eyewitness Tahrir Al Selik conducted by Journalist Tarneem Khater.

Tahrir's brother-in-law was martyred.

Tahrir says, "I found my father-in-law lying on his face; he was dead. I looked around, and found my two daughters, Ola and Malak, in each other's arms of extreme fear. Ola was headless, but Malak was still alive." Due to the magnitude of the trauma, Tahrir could not move, and so, lost consciousness amidst the martyrs and injured. As if the crimes the occupation forces had committed were not enough, they launched the third missile when the ambulance arrived to save Al Selik family, injuring Tahrir's daughter, and her brothers-in-law, as well as killing a number of paramedics and journalists present at the place.

Mrs. Ferial Isleem, 33 years old, tells another tragedy of hundreds of tragedies that befell on women due to the crimes committed by the occupation forces during their assault on Gaza Strip²³. Her tragedy is manifested in the murder of her three children, and her displacement from her house in Shujaya Neighborhood on July 20, the day of the massacre.

On July 20, 2014 occupation forces threw leaflets to residents of the eastern borders, demanding them to evacuate the region in preparation for the invasion of the entire area.

Therefore, the majority of residents decided to leave their houses. At the beginning Ferial's husband refused to leave; however, he then decided to join the others upon Ferial's endless crying, and extreme fear.

Ferial says, "My family and I were running, and I was praying to God to keep us safe. As we were trying to escape, I was separated from my children, Ola, 12 years and Fady, 11 years, among the crowds. I tried searching for them, but I did not find them. I went crazy and started crying unconsciously, and started looking here and there so I could find them but to no avail. My husband asked me to continue walking for we might find them ahead of us."

During their journey, Ferial learned that her missing children were actually at a house that belonged to Ayyad family. So, her older son, Shady, 16 years old, decided to go back to get them. Meanwhile, the others resumed walking towards Al Shifa Hospital. No sooner than Shady had arrived at the house his siblings were hiding at, the occupation forces raided the place, killing Ferial's 3 children.

Ferial was traumatized for she was waiting for her children to join her. When her husband heard the news, he tried to sidestep the news so as to ease the shock on her. So, he first told her that their kids were injured, yet she did not believe him. Ferial says, "When I woke up from the shock, they asked me to bid farewell only to my son Shady, but not Ola or Fady for they were severely injured in the head."

The story of Attrah²⁴ shows other aspects of women's suffering during the Israeli aggression on Gaza, as well as the state of fear and intimidation they lived before she lost her husband. She became a widow, and thus, her psychological, physical, and social suffering was doubled, having to take over various roles of both men and women. Attrah is in her fifties, and lives in Khuzaa border town, East of Khan Younis. On July 23, 2014 bombardment on Khuzaa was intensified, blocking the main road of the town. Her son received a text message from the Israeli occupation forces, commanding residents to leave the area; the war planes also threw leaflets with the same contents on the area. Yet, the husband refused to leave, so the family stayed in the house. Several days later, they ran out of food and water, and Attrah heard the neighbors' yells, telling each other to go to the town entrance as the International Committee of the Red Cross Staff were waiting there. Attrah says, "I could not believe myself; I called my husband, and we left hurriedly. There were a lot of people like us. As soon as we had arrived at the town entrance, the tanks launched their shells and opened fire randomly." She saw people fall between dead and injured, and she could no longer see her husband and children. Her daughter, Shatha, was holding her hand and crying. Attrah started yelling, "Abu Mohammed, where are you? Where are my children?" and she started calling their names out.

23 An interview conducted by Journalist Tarneem Khater with eyewitness Ferial Isleem on Monday 15\09\2014.

24 An interview with eyewitness, Mrs. Attrah, conducted by Journalist Reenat Abu Rjeela on 20\09\2014. Women's Affairs Center refuses to publish her name and other personal data upon her request.

The mother and daughter ran quickly towards some stores under a building near the road, where she found her husband and other children. In the following morning, all people present in those stores agreed to raise white flags, and leave through the alley.

The husband took his family to his married daughter's house, and returned to check on his brothers. However, he did not survive; he was killed by an Israeli raid. Attrah was unable to bid her husband farewell. His corpse remained in the morgue for 15 days before they could bury him in Beni Suhaila due to the gravity of accessing that area.

The data listed above, which is based on the testimonies of victims and witnesses, shows that the occupation forces committed war crimes, most obviously their violation to the principle of distinction and proportionality. They have targeted civilians, properties of civilians, and civilian objects, causing hundreds of victims in their lines in a grave and systematic violation to articles 32, 33, 53, and 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Killing Fetuses Inside Wombs of Their Mothers:

The catastrophic implications of the Israeli aggression on women were not limited to killing them, injuring or killing their children and husbands, forcibly displacing them, or destroying their house, but it also caused miscarriages for hundreds of women.

In this context, Undersecretary of Ministry of Women's Affairs, Amira Haroun, indicated in a press release that (610) woman had had a miscarriage in July and August; in addition, 14 % of the born children were completely deformed due to the assault; not to mention the premature infants that amounted to 70 cases, according to information from medical resources in the Palestinian Ministry of Health.²⁵

Consequences of a miscarriage are not only limited to the psychological effects on the victim due to the loss and the pain resulting from losing her long-awaited dream, rather, it causes several health hazards, some of which could lead to death, inability to conceive again, as well as other damages that affect the uterus such as bleeding... etc.²⁶

The report shows the suffering of two women out of hundreds of other women who underwent the woe of miscarriage due to cases of extreme fear. Upon surviving the heavy and intensive bombardment on residential areas, and the shelling of houses, women had to flee, running on foot, which caused miscarriages, and they lost their fetuses.

Nour Hamdan²⁷ from Al Tofah Neighborhood could not rejoice the news of her pregnancy for long as the neighborhood was exposed to heavy random bombardment that forced her to flee on foot. Hamdan pointed out that after walking for a long distance she felt so terrible and severe pain down her stomach that she could not stand. Moreover, her husband's numerous attempts to get an ambulance had failed for the area was too dangerous.

Nour says, "I was dying from the intensity of the pain, and when the ambulances could not reach us my husband managed to find a taxi. We took it to Al Shifaa hospital, where we were informed that my baby had died." As Nour yearns to her unborn baby, she could not help but think about what may happen to her future children. Nour says, "I wish my fetus had stayed alive; I wish I were blessed with a child that would have made my life more beautiful; nevertheless, the occupation killed my dream when it killed my fetus, and I became lonely without it. I remember its first kick inside my womb; I even miss my morning sickness. I did not get the chance to lay my eyes on my baby, but I felt it with my heart."

The mother adds, "I pray to God to bless me with children to compensate my loss to my first baby, but I fear for

25 A published report on Al Resalah website. See full report on the following link: <http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=101822>

26 For more details about the health damages caused to women by abortion, see published report for abortion complications on Health For All Website on the following link: <http://hfa.mawared.org/?q=node/744>

27 An interview with eyewitness Mrs. Nour Hamdan carried out by Journalist Neveen Abu Shamalah on 25\11\2014.

my future children from the occupation; the thought of losing them terrorizes me.”

In another tragic story, a woman carrying her daughter in her arms escaped the heavy shelling, and as soon as she arrived to the shelter, she felt so content for surviving an inevitable death. Yet, she started bleeding, which meant she had lost her fetus due to the horrors and fear she had undergone in addition to the huge physical effort she had exerted to save her life as well as the lives of her family.

Um Baker, 30 years old,²⁸ is one of the women who had lost their fetuses during the assault; this mother lost the baby she had always dreamed of holding between her arms. She had long yearned for its arrival so as to fill her life with joy and delight. She had even prepared all her baby's accessories from clothes, toys, and nursery. Since the beginning of this aggression Um Baker, who lives in Al Atatra Area, north of Gaza Strip, used to follow up all the events through the various media outlets. She used to feel immense fear that only grew bigger every time the bombing intensified around their area.

Her husband's attempts to comfort her were unsuccessful; thus, he decided to flee to an UNRWA school. So, as Um Baker carried her 2 year daughter, her husband took care of his elderly mother.

Once the family had arrived at the school, Um Baker started to cry, not believing she had survived those planes that were shelling everywhere. Before she could catch her breath, she felt a sudden severe pain in her stomach and back, and then she started bleeding heavily.

She says, “As the bleeding increased, I rapidly headed towards Al Shifa Hospital accompanied by my husband and mother-in-law. We barely managed to find a car to drive us there. When we arrived at the maternity ward, the place was packed with cases of miscarriages due to psychological stress and physical fatigue as a result of the assault.”

After conducting the necessary tests to identify the cause of the bleeding, Um Baker's expectations were confirmed; the doctor told her, “May God compensate you with something better. The baby is not moving; it is dead. You need an abortion immediately.”

Although this mother had expected this harsh outcome, she was shocked and devastated. Um Baker says, “In those moments, I started imagining how its arrival, reception, celebrating its first week, and its sacrifice would have been like.” She continues to speak of her agony, “I started saying “they killed my joy; they killed my baby before I could see it”.”

Practices of occupation forces point to its momentous violation to articles (17 and 27) of the Fourth Geneva Convention which state that protection and special arrangements should be made for the removal of the wounded, sick, infirm, and elderly persons, children and maternity cases from besieged or encircled areas. Furthermore, these practices are a violation to the principles of the International Humanitarian Law for the attacks committed by the Israeli forces were marked by their brutality. In addition, these attacks targeted residential houses as well as women during their attempts to survive and flee from their areas along with the crowds of civilians.

Demolition and Destruction of Houses and Displacement of Women:

The demolition and destruction of houses as well as apartment towers is one of the policies adopted by the occupation forces in its collective punishment of people. The demolition and destruction of houses is considered as a compound violation, given its disastrous impacts that affect the entire human rights of the victims.

In addition to destroying their houses, residents are coercively displaced; they are humiliated due to the lack of suitable alternatives to shelter the families in a manner that would maintain the minimum level of dignity as well as provide the minimal requirements of a good life.

28 Journalist Tarneem Al Khateeb conducts the interview with eyewitness Um Baker on Sunday 07\09\2014. Women's Affairs Center refuses to publish Um Baker's name and personal data upon her request.

Families are displaced and dispersed; children become incapable of living normally; they are forced to transfer to new schools; they lose contents of their houses, such as furniture, beds, and clothes. Children lack the minimal requirements of their right to clothing, food, and a proper house.

According to information published by the Palestinian human rights organizations, UNRWA, and Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the occupied Palestinian territories, the number of people forcibly displaced from their homes during the aggression has exceeded 500,000 people.²⁹ Meanwhile, results of the joint documentation campaign carried out by human rights organizations show that (31984) residential houses and buildings were destroyed, including (8377) that were completely destroyed. Furthermore, the number of displaced residents whose houses were entirely destroyed is (250918), including (67448) women and (124678) children.³⁰

Women probably suffer the most because, in addition to being victims who experienced difficult times owing to the bombing, destruction, and explosions that surrounded their houses as well as escaping under fire in an attempt to survive an inevitable death, women are forced to take on roles that exceed their ability to endure. They suffer from the trauma, yet they are forced to alleviate the impact of the shock on their children. They are also forced to carry out their duties in caring for the children, maintaining their cleanliness, and preparing their food despite their loss to all utilities; that is, there are no available sanitation facilities that are suitable to meet the purpose, no kitchen or crockery, cooker, or stove for cooking.

Moreover, women are forced to lose their privacy, and to stay fully dressed including their head cover despite of the extreme hot weather due to the prevailing conservative culture in the Gaza Strip.

The demolition and destruction of houses forms a compound offense involving several war crimes, such as targeting houses, killing residents inside their homes, which has unprecedentedly escalated in the recent assault, the coercive displacement of the people, not providing the necessary measures to ensure health care for pregnant women, children, the sick, and elderly people, such as ensuring their removal from areas that are targeted by military operations to safer areas, and providing food and medicine supplies as well as medical services. These are all serious violations that amount to war crimes.

Hence this section of the report attempts to shed light on the varied aspects of the crime of targeting houses through the narrations of the victims about the tragedies they had faced during this assault.

Um Shehadah Al Khabaz, in her fifties, looked absent-minded as her soft hands were moving around leaves of mallow that she and her friends had picked earlier when they came to check on her. She was lying down on the stairs, the only thing left of a newly built three-floor building that had been also expensively furnished. She was preparing and finishing the third floor so as to wed her elder son; nonetheless, missiles of the occupation destroyed her dream.

Um Shehadah³¹ lives near the eastern border of the Gaza Strip, and, like other residents of the area, she was forced to flee under random artillery shelling to her area. Her three-floor house was shelled on the first day of Eid Al Fitr, and one of her neighbors delivered the news over the phone. She was shocked, and lost consciousness.

She says, "I could not believe what I had heard from my neighbors, and what had happened to my house. When

29 Numbers of forcibly displaced people during the aggression are based on the statements and press releases issued by the Relief and Works Agency refugees (UNRWA) and Palestinian human rights organizations.

30 Figures are based on the outcome of the joint documentation campaign carried out by human rights organizations - the resource was previously mentioned.

31 Journalist Mageda Al Belbesy conducted the interview with eyewitness Mrs. Um Shehada Al Khabaz on Wednesday 01\10\2014. Women's Affairs Center refuses to publish the witness's name and personal data upon her request.

the truce came into effect, I came to check on my house, only to find that it had become a pile of scattered rubble. The house was destroyed along with all our things and belongings; only some pillars had remained standing. Everything was burned and buried under the rubble." The only part left of Um Shehadah's house is the staircase; thus, the family had to resort to the Paradise Mosque near their house.

She says, "When the Imam of the mosque knew about us and our living conditions, his heart was broken for us, and he tried to help us. He allowed me and my husband to temporarily use the library of the mosque as a room to sleep in at night, and, at the same time, we would protect the mosque against robberies as well as guard it from vandals. As for the rest of the day, I spend it under the staircase, running my daily chores."

As the family waits for the reconstruction, the husband is building two rooms of tin since they were unable to find a house for rent that would fit the family's financial ability.

Listed below is another story that exposes the collective forcible displacement where residents were pushed to flee their houses unable to rescue their personal belongings given the terrors and intimidation they underwent when one would feel that death is inevitable.

I went into a small alley, heading towards a tent that was set up next to "only" two cracked walls that were about to fall down at any moment owing to the intense bombing that took place here. These walls were all that was left of a house that was a home for 11 people before the 21 July, 2014; it was a home for Um Emad's family of Al Shaaf area.

Um Emad Al Mobaid,³² a woman in her late sixties, was sitting in the center of this tent, kneading dough. Drops of sweat were cluttering on her forehead which was highlighted with ruddiness due to the efforts she was exerting into making pastries for her children's lunch.

Um Emad sat there, telling her story, "It was 6:00 in the morning when the bombing intensified from all directions, and we did not have any options but to leave the house; we were forced to go to any other place even if it were the sea."

Um Emad and her family left the house without any luggage, and headed to one of the UNRWA schools, but they did not find space. So, they decided to take refuge at the Greek Orthodox Church where they stayed for 3 days until the neighboring cemetery was bombed.

The family was forced to seek shelter at the house of their son's friend that was already swarming with displaced people. In the last truce, the family returned to their house to find only rubble; as a result, Um Emad lost her sewing equipment which had been their source of income for 40 years. She says, "After the ceasefire, my son insisted on cultivating the small land remaining around the house again with some vegetables for he likes gardening."

Um Emad and her husband sleep in a small room in a "block" laboratory that belongs to a relative, male family members sleep in the tent, while her daughters sleep in an UNRWA school. Um Emad is looking for a three-room house to rent to accommodate her scattered family, especially since winter is almost here, and the tent has failed to protect them from winter storms and rain.

Um Emad suffers from harsh psychological conditions owing to her husband's violence as he creates problems for the slightest reasons. She says, "I want neither food nor drink. I do not want food "coupons". I just want to restore our house so it would shelter us and preserve our dignity, and so I could go back to my sewing which runs into my veins."

The following survival story manifests fear, terror, brutal scenes, and dire conditions as witnessed by the

32 Journalist Mageda Al Belbesy conducted the interview with eyewitness Mrs. Um Emad Al Mobaid on Wednesday 08\10\2014. Women's Affairs Center refuses to publish the witness's name and personal data upon her request.

Palestinian women throughout the Israeli assault on Gaza. It not only shows the lack of life basics inside the shelters, but also the psychological stress suffered by any woman whose children are sick, and husband is psychologically suffering. This, in turn, has increased the stress for women.

Ever since Israel had announced the beginning of the military operation on the Gaza Strip, Um Qassem, a 42 year old mother³³, felt nothing but fear and anticipation. She was on alert all the time; she would jump in fear at any sound, far or near. Israeli air planes would not stop hovering and targeting any moving objects. Hence, she was petrified of an immense land incursion that could startle her and her family that consists of 4 members. Um Qassem lives along with her family near a border area, called Abu Al Ajeen, to the East of Dir Al Balah. Danger was practically surrounding them. The family was forced to flee after their house that was constructed with asbestos had fallen apart as a result of a huge explosion.

Um Qassem says, "We were forced to leave the house on the first day of the incursion, since our house ceiling collapsed; we could hear the sounds of the shells getting closed as well as our neighbors screams at us, telling us to evacuate because everything was being targeted.

Once we had left, a bomb was dropped on a motor bike next to us, burning two people. It was so terrifying; I was trying to prevent my kids from looking at this harsh and painful scene. It never leaves my memory."

She adds, "Additionally, on our way, another bomb hit a family on a cart. It looked like they all died as a result. The scene was too much to bear by either kids or adults.

Even my kids' crying and weeping got louder". Um Qassem took refuge at an UNRWA shelter. Two of her kids were suffering from renal failure. Their conditions worsened because hospitals were already packed with wounded people, and therefore, were unable to provide health care for them.

Besides, her husband's perturbation deteriorated owing to his mental illness and emotional disorders. Now, their house is completely destroyed. They live in an UNRWA shelter; her kids go to another UNRWA school. There seems to be no hope in any change.

The fourth story displays even more aspects of suffering and agony experienced by women at the shelters where their privacy is lost; lots of the very simple details that cannot be thought of by those who were never displaced become an impossible dream.

Under the heavy shelling, Um Haythm Abu Ghounneema³⁴, 35 years old, fled together with the rest of the Towers' residents to the nearest shelter. So, she went to one of her in-laws' house. Despite the fact that death was surrounding all residents of the Gaza Strip, no one showed her empathy, and her husband's relatives did not welcome her in their house. She cried all night as she waited for the morning. Um Haytham says, "Nobody wanted us, so the only solution left was to go to one of the UNRWA shelters." However, a few days later, Um Haytham and her family moved into a caravan for the shelter due to the huge number of members in her family which created problems with the other families in the classroom. It was no better in the caravan. "It was extremely boiling during the day and bitterly cold at night", she says.

Living in a school, and going to another school to learn, Um Haytham's kids are confused; they are no longer able to tell the difference between a school and a house. This started showing low academic achievement. They do not even have the desire to study due to the dire circumstances that created a very bad mood and mental state inside of each one of them. All Um Haytham and her displaced neighbors desire now is to return back to their houses and that the whole world would know about their misery.

33 Interview conducted with eyewitness Mrs. Um Qassem Al Buheiry on Tuesday 07\10\2014 by Journalist Samar Abu Ouf. Women's Affairs Center refuses to publish the witness's name and personal data upon her request.

34 Interview conducted with eyewitness Mrs. Um Haytham Ghounneem on Wednesday 01\10\2014 by Journalist Shaimaa Meqdad. Women's Affairs Center refuses to publish the witness's name and personal data upon her request.

Targeting residential buildings as well as forcing displacement on a large scale of population, particularly women that were carried out by the Israeli forces mark a huge and systematic violation to the laws of the International Humanitarian Law, namely articles numbers 32, 33, 49, 53, and 106 of the Fourth Geneva Conventions.

Women's immense suffering at the shelters showed the extent of negligence on behalf of the international community, local organizations, and international organizations generally, and UNRWA particularly of Resolution number 1325 of the UN Security Council and also the following resolutions related to empowering women's participation and integrating them in the peace-building process or documentation of violations they are subjected to during armed conflicts.

For example, women were not involved in supervising these shelters despite the fact that the majority of refugees are women and children, and that these very shelters were the main reason of torment to the women. It could have been a lot easier for women to ease their pain had women been part of the staff administering these shelters.

The Psychological Impact on Women

The impact of destroying a house varies significantly from one family to another. That is, women and men perceive the value of the house from different perspectives, since a house for a woman is perceived as her own space within which she functions, maintains her privacy, and manages it; in addition, her house helps her play her social and educational role perfectly.

The value grows to be even more precious if a woman is not working, or not active in politics or other social activities; that is, she does not have a role in the public life.

Therefore, the state of fear doubles these women's psychological pressure to a larger extent compared to men. Unlike men, despite of their panic and anxiety, women are obliged to resume their role of taking care of the house, tending the children, and trying to ease their fear.

While men, in general, do not have such responsibilities even if they are afraid and worried, and therefore, the stress they might have is a lot less than that experienced by women. Sometimes, men become a source of annoyance to women since they tend to be more nervous, and unable to be understanding to women's special conditions, which adds more burdens on women.

Similarly, the impact of displacement and living at a shelter on women cannot be compared to that of men simply because women lose their privacy outside of their houses, particularly in a conservative society such as the Gazan society.

Being women puts huge psychological burdens on them for they have to keep going on playing their social role under lack of, and sometimes absence of, the basics of a dignified life such as going to the bathroom or having a shower. Yet, she has to take care of her children's cleanliness, health, and food.

Implications of war reach the peak for women who lost their husbands during the offense for they find themselves confronting a tough decision: either she marries her husbands' brother despite the age difference; in some cases, the substitute is ten years younger or older. Or, she would lose her own house that is part of a residential facility owned by the husband's extended family. This renders women as victims twice: victims of Israeli occupation and victims of the dominant masculine culture of the society - the latter adds more pressure and stress on the part of women.

Gaza Community Mental Health Program conducted a study in order to assess the repercussions of the Israeli aggression launched on the Gaza Strip in November, 2012 particularly on the mental health of children and their families as well as their psychological and social well-being on the long term.³⁵

35 For the full summary of the study, see the following link : <http://www.gcmhp.com/en/news.aspx?id=1068>

The study points out that mothers showed increased psychosomatic disorders (somatization), signs of anxiety fear (phobia), and digestive disorders more than fathers. Although both fathers and mothers were exposed to equal levels of stress, mothers are proved to be more worried about family problems and law violations that directly affect family members than fathers.

Yet, the findings raise questions concerning effects of the brutality of war as well as everyday pressures on the mental health of the parents.

Regression analysis model of pressure and tension shows that war trauma became statistically ineffective compared to family pressures and violations of family laws which proved to be more negative than war trauma. Besides, the findings show that fathers have higher ability to adapt to new circumstances than women.

This is due to the fact that fathers have higher levels of adaptation sources which are reflected upon their self-esteem, communication skills, ability to achieve, health, support of extended family, and finances. However, these means of adaptation, especially the ability to achieve and health seem to ease the traumas of war, daily stress and nervousness amongst parents.

Summary

According to the facts mentioned in the report, the Israeli forces committed grave and systematic violations to the fundamental rules of the International Humanitarian law as a military necessity, principles of proportionality and distinction throughout their last assault on Gaza.

Israel never took any procedures that would guarantee protection of civilians and their possessions, or maintain their dignity as humans. Therefore, civilians, especially women and children were the direct target of the attacks; so were the residential buildings, public facilities and the infrastructure. This increased civilians' suffering, particularly women.

As a conclusion, the Israeli practices violated Israel's legal commitment to the Fourth Geneva Convention as well as to its two additional protocols. These violations amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The facts also imply that the international community's inability to fulfill its legal commitment to urgent protection of civilians as well as halting the violations against them led contributed to the increased number of victims and massive physical losses in houses, private possessions, public facilities and infrastructure.

The fact that the International Commission of Inquiry was denied access to Gaza, the crime scene of the Israeli Forces' misconducts, shows the complicity and insincerity on the part of the International Community in regards of investigating the crimes committed during the attack on Gaza. This was crystal clear when it abstained from pressuring the Israel Authorities to allow the Commission of Inquiry to enter the Gaza Strip, or facilitating its arrival through the Egyptian borders.

Moreover, the findings indicate that women were not involved in relief efforts or at the shelters. This greatly contributed to magnifying the misery of forcefully displaced women since their real needs are so difficult to be explained to men; additionally, for lots of these women, it is difficult to disclose the aspects of their suffering. Marginalizing and ignoring women were even apparent in the negotiations held during the offense which led to ending the assault. Also women were not included in the peace-making process.

The points below sum up the above mentioned crimes:

1. The Israeli forces targeted civilians, particularly women and children
2. The Israeli forces bombed residential areas, destroying towers, and tens of thousands of houses.
3. The Israeli forces deliberately bombed houses while their residents were inside.
4. The Israeli forces did not follow effective procedures to warn civilians; in addition, they deliberately destroyed their possessions and did not give them enough time to evacuate their houses.
5. The Israeli forces deterred the removal of the wounded, deceased, ill, and the besieged ones.

6. The Israeli forces intentionally targeted residents who were trying to escape to safer places.
7. The Israeli forces used civilians, particularly women, as human shields
8. The Israeli forces targeted water and electricity supply networks, electricity plant, public and private water reservoirs.

The Israeli forces targeted shelters, especially UNRWA shelters.

Recommendations

Field facts show the gravity of the violations committed by the Israeli Forces against civilians, particularly women in Gaza, that amount to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity. They also show the huge suffering those women went through; the suffering that is still going on even after the attack has ended owing to the international community continuous evasiveness of its legal and ethical commitment towards Gazan civilians, especially women. Therefore, Women's Affairs Center demands the following:

1. The international community should prosecute whoever is suspected to have committed war crimes against women particularly and against civilians generally in Gaza. The center urges the international community as well as the United Nations Secretary to fulfill the will of the Human Rights Council of the UN and guarantee the arrival of its commission of inquiry to examine and investigate the war crimes in Gaza
2. The high parties that signed Geneva Conventions should prosecute whoever is proved to be involved in committing war crimes, or in ordering those crimes to be done, be it the Israeli Prime Minister, or Defense Minister. The Center emphasize that this is a legally binding obligation according to articles 1, and 146
3. Lifting the siege that has been imposed on the Gaza Strip for the last eight years, and that has been causing the deterioration of the humane conditions of women, as well as violating their entire rights. It is women that actually pay the price of the ongoing states of poverty and unemployment
4. Working on altering what has been called Siri's Reconstruction Plan, for there has been no progress in this regard ever since the war was over. Not only that, but it is noticed that this very plan is what, in fact, enhances the siege, making it sustainable. Meanwhile, the restrictions on freedom of movement for women and all other citizens are still imposed.
5. Trying to involve women, who were affected by the war, including those forcibly displaced, in planning and executing reconstruction projects, providing relief aids for the displaced, and supervising the shelters so that they could alleviate the suffering of the victimized women.
6. The center urges the Secretary of the United Nations to assist in establishing a mechanism for monitoring and documenting violations against women regardless of the part committing these violations; filing periodic reports about women and the violations against them; recruiting experiences and experts of the Palestinian society to come up with agreed upon tools that can be used in monitoring and documenting.
7. The center urges the Palestinian government to start working to ease the civilians' suffering in the Gaza Strip and putting an end to the ongoing double standards.
8. The Palestinian president, both Fatah and Hamas, and all other factions should put an end to the political division that is a direct source of the Palestinians' suffering, particularly women. They also have to unify the national efforts aiming at halting the Israeli occupation, and freeing man and land.

Besides, the center invites the women's movement across the world as well as all women in the world to promote solidarity with the Palestinian women who are taking part in the national struggle for freedom and liberty of the Israeli occupation, and, on a social level, in a struggle to claim their rights, especially rights of full equality, and fighting all forms of discrimination that they are exposed to.