

A Survivor's Testimony



By Marah Shamali

I don't know where to start or what to say about the current situation here in Gaza because we are not numbers. Everyone has a story to tell! It is my destiny that I was born in a geographical area where wars and sieges haven't stopped since my birth. I have survived three wars but was not sure I would survive this one. During the 2008 Israeli aggression, I was 9 years old; in the 2012 Israeli assault, I was 13 years old; in 2014, I was 15 years old. And here I am, 22 now! I still remember vividly when the Israeli occupation forces bombed us directly in 2014. My mother and brother were seriously injured, but miraculously, we survived. The story is too long to tell, but the scars of the 2014 war have not yet been erased by time, and the 2021 Israeli aggression brought back these painful memories, as time repeats itself. At the beginning of every Israeli assault, my mother sends us to my

grandfather's house. Is that strange? Of course not! Actually, this is what every Gazan family does to make sure that if the occupation strikes the house, at least one or two of them would survive and the entire family would not be completely obliterated.

One night, I wrote a tweet saying, "I am afraid of staying at home and living the Shuja'iya Massacre of 2014 once again." Then again, I am afraid of leaving and being bombed and wounded as in 2014. There is no safe place in Gaza!" Two hours later, I tweeted, "The shelling has intensified, we can't live the 2014

massacre again! We will leave the house now, pray for us." We went out and were surprised to find that all the people in our area were leaving in the middle of night. They were leaving their homes, hopes, and memories, yearning for safety that was in no way guaranteed. We moved to my aunt's home, where about 40 people live in the same house. We had hoped it would be safer for us to stay there, but in reality it was more heavily bombarded every night. They say "death with a group is mercy." We didn't gain the safety we had hoped

Photo by Shareef Sarhan.



for. When the tower next to my aunt's home was bombed, we ran in panic into the street to escape, thinking that perhaps the street was safer than the houses, as they are being destroyed over the heads of their owners without warning.

Every night we ask ourselves, "Are we going to end up as breaking news tonight? Are we going to die before living the day of freedom?" Every day, we woke up to write, "Thank God, we are still alive."

No video or photo on the media needs a caption! The scenes we see are not from movies, they are real and painful scenes for Palestinians who are now homeless. Towers, highly skilled doctors, main streets, universities, peaceful homes,

government centers, mosques, restaurants, anything in Gaza that holds hope – they destroy. The offices of the Ministry of Social Affairs that provided urgent relief to thousands of orphans, widows, needy families, and disabled persons have been attacked and destroyed. The only center for COVID-19 testing has been destroyed. They need to maximize our pain and kill us, too!!

All streets that lead to Al-Shifa Hospital, the largest and most important medical center in Gaza, have been shelled. Now, ambulances can go in or out only with difficulty. This is a war crime!

During 100 airstrikes in less than 15 minutes, Israel killed 21 whole families, targeting children and

The more Israel thinks about wiping out our people and taking our land, the more we are determined to survive. Whatever Israel does, we Palestinians wake up every morning to teach the whole world about life, Sir!

newborn babies. This is the "bank of targets" for terrorists.ⁱ

Social media prevents us from posting Palestinian content, as Instagram and Facebook are deleting hashtags about Palestine. This means that they are doing everything they can to support the occupation and prevent us from publishing the truth of occupation terrorism!

We say, "We refuse to die," while we cry. But once we stop our tears, we continue, saying with a smile, "Tell them we will stay."

This is an extraordinary time, even if it is one of the most difficult times. This time, Gaza is stronger, no matter what happens, because we will build again. This time, Gaza is not alone. Palestinians are united from Ras al-Naqura to Umm al-Rashrash.

Gazans are heroes. This is our generation; we are the youth of the future, and we have nothing to

lose. Countries with equipment, budgets, wealth, and relationships have not accomplished a quarter of what Gaza has. This is a city that has been besieged since the year 2007. It resists on several fronts and suffers from the restrictions of the occupation that puts us down every time we feel that we are regaining part of our dignity and hope for the liberation of our land. But I swear to God, I am ready to die here; we are full of dignity and perseverance!

Marah Shamali is a 21-year-old dental student in Gaza. She was born during the second Intifada and has never traveled outside the Gaza Strip. She has survived four Israeli military operations and attacks on Gaza. Her father was imprisoned in Israeli jails for a few years; the Israeli army assassinated two of her uncles and two of her cousins.

Photo by Atieh Darwish.



ⁱ During the 2014 assault on Gaza, the Shujai'ya Massacre was deemed a war crime by the UN Permanent Observer Mission in Palestine. For more information, visit <https://palestineun.org/21-july-2014-shujaiya-massacre-and-bombardment-by-israel-against-gaza-civilians/>.

ⁱⁱ "Bank of targets" is the literal translation of the term used by Israel to denote its targets when shelling and bombing Gaza.