

Tell me, who is the terrorist?! By Inge Neefs, ISM Gaza

Two days ago, on March 22nd 2011, the Israeli army attacked a populated area in the Al-Shejaija neighborhood, east of Gaza City. Four days after the murder of two children in Johr Al-Dik, the Israeli army once again killed civilians, amongst them two more children. The latest victims of Israel's war crimes are Yasser A'ahid Al-Helo (15), Mohamed Jalal Al-Helo (10), Mohammed Shaber Harara (18) and Yasser Hamid Al-Helo (55).

At approximately 3 pm, Israeli tanks, positioned along the border, hit Al-Nazzaz street, 2 km from the border with four consecutive artillery shells. The first one hit Samer Walid Mushtaha's house, destroying the upper floor. His wife, who was preparing dinner, had just gone downstairs and missed the attack by chance. The second shell hit vacant land nearby belonging to the Al-Helo family. The third one hit a group of children and older boys who were playing football near their houses, as they do every single day. 10 year old Mohamed Jalal Al-Helo and 19 year old Mohamed Saber Harara were immediately killed and their bodies brutally dismembered. Ten more children and an adult were also injured by shrapnel. Three year old Yasser A'amer Al-Helo and six year old Ahmad Talal Al-Helo are currently in the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital with severe injuries. Yasser Hamed Al-Helo and his 15 year old grandson Yaser Ahed Al-Helo were opening the garage door to take out the car and rescue the wounded when they were hit by the fourth shell. They were killed on the spot.

This was the third attack on Al-Shejaija that day. At 10 am artillery fire injured one person and later in the morning another was reported to have been critically wounded by a drone strike.

Yesterday morning, Israeli military sources were quoted on Israeli radio as stating that one of the shells veered off and caused casualties. However, these four shells targeted a civilian area therefore civilian casualties were to be expected. According to witnesses, not one, but two different shells caused the deaths of these four civilians.

On Tuesday afternoon, the bodies of the four killed were brought to Shifa hospital in Gaza City in horrific conditions from the attacks. Ten year old Mohammed had been struck in the head by shrapnel, causing his skull to crack. Yesterday morning, an outraged and grief stricken crowd of people gathered at the morgue to carry the bodies to the mosque.

Today, the families set up mourning tents to allow friends and relatives to give their condolences. The outside of the houses are tattered with holes from the attack, while emotions boil over on the inside.

"Tell me, who's the terrorist!? Who is killing innocent children? Who!? My little nephew's head exploded! And many others are injured! Are you telling the world who the real terrorist is, are you!?" Um Tarreq yells at me, infuriated by grief, anger, fear and sadness. Her cries blow me away and I answer her rage with tears that are rolling down her cheeks also. She was the first one to lay eyes on the horrible scene of dead and injured children and is the mother of one of the nine children that has been injured. Her son is still hospitalized awaiting surgery on his arm. "They play football there every single afternoon, from 3 to 5, after school! What are they who kill children!?"

Next to her sits another family member, she yells and then cries when she starts talking about what is happening. "I have all young girls at home and they are so afraid. They already killed

children, in broad daylight! Yesterday during the day and at night drones and Apaches were out. And now there is this big drone hovering over the neighborhood, you saw it? How can I protect my daughters?"

Since the 2nd Intifada, seven people of the Al-Helo family have been killed by Israeli attacks. During Operation Cast Lead, tanks shelled a house, killing Foa'ad (55), his son Mohammed (25) and Mohammed's two year old daughter Farrah. The bodies could only be evacuated after three days.

"I just wish you would tell the world we're not terrorists. We're just unlucky that we don't have oil, otherwise the US would support the Palestinian cause for sure", says Ra'aid Al-Helo, one of the family members.

Inge Neefs is a Belgian peace activist who was on board the Freedom Flotilla which tried to break the siege on Gaza. Inge has been living in the Gaza Strip for the past 5 months, working as a volunteer for the ISM (International Solidarity Movement)