



## NARRATIVES OF SIEGE: EYE-WITNESS TESTIMONIES FROM JENIN, BETHLEHEM, AND NABLUS

IDA AUDEH

*The testimonies below were collected from 10 to 17 May 2002. I traveled first to Jenin refugee camp. No matter how many images you have seen in the news, nothing quite prepares you for the devastation at the camp's ground zero. The storeys-high mountains of rubble are littered with reminders of lives disrupted: a mattress here, a child's schoolbook there. The 373-dunam camp, which had been home to about 13,600 residents, had been invaded at least twice before the assault that began on 3 April. The camp held out for nine days—a point of pride for many residents. Though a total of only fifty-six bodies have been found, rumors persist of mass graves and of trucks carrying body bags to undisclosed locations. Many of those who lost their homes are living with relatives in Jenin town and elsewhere, further hampering efforts to account for the missing. According to Human Rights Watch, at least 140 buildings were completely leveled and more than 200 others severely damaged, leaving about 4,000 people—more than a quarter of the population—homeless.*

*The Israelis invaded Bethlehem (population 45,000) on 29 March, the second time in a month. The town was kept under siege for forty-four days, though world attention focused almost exclusively on the Church of the Nativity, traditional birthplace of Christ, besieged as of 2 April. Though not subjected to the kind of devastation seen in Jenin and Nablus, numerous centuries-old facades were destroyed or heavily damaged.*

*I had every intention of traveling to Nablus, a city that had put up impressive resistance to the Israeli onslaught (which began on 3 April) and that had sustained heavy casualties and the destruction of large areas of the historic Old City. However, the numerous roadblocks and alternate routes necessitated by checkpoints and settler snipers turned the forty-minute drive to Nablus into an unpredictable journey that could last up to five hours. I had to settle for phone interviews. Official estimates of fatalities in this city of 110,000 run to about eighty.*

*In Jenin refugee camp and Bethlehem, the sight of residents talking to a stranger with a tape recorder tended to attract other residents, and often more than one perspective was offered on events. Because I allowed interviewees to talk, rarely*

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**IDA AUDEH**, a technical writer in Boulder, Colorado, collected these testimonies and translated them from the Arabic. She would like to thank the following people who facilitated her interviews: Bahía Amra; Muhammad Abu al-Hayja', Jamil al-Hamad, and Ghassan Hamdan of the Medical Relief Association; Nawal 'Amer of Jenin refugee camp; Muhammad Hammad and Sami Sab'ana of Jenin; and Taghrid Hamdan and Chrissy of Bethlehem. She is especially grateful to the individuals whom she interviewed.

*interrupting them, some of their narratives contain gaps and some confusion, even inconsistencies, which I have made no attempt to eliminate. At the same time, I was struck by how careful interviewees tried to be in recounting their stories, clearly distinguishing between what they had seen and what they had heard. No one rushed to accuse the Israeli army of looting (a commonly reported feature of house searches in the Ramallah area, for example); when they witnessed it, they were careful to describe the scope. Some interviewees reported the presence of Arabic-speaking soldiers, some with Lebanese accents (presumably South Lebanese Army soldiers who fled Lebanon after the Israeli withdrawal in 1999); others did not. Above all else, I was struck by the extraordinary dignity and restraint with which these people described terrible moments in their lives—when they lost a son or their homes, when they were put at great risk, when they tried to locate their dead or wounded—at a time when their entire futures were clouded with doubt.*

## JENIN REFUGEE CAMP

### Issa Mahmud Sabbagh and Halima Muhammad Yahya

*Sabbagh*: I did not see my son Jamal when he was martyred. The soldiers came to the house across from ours and took him. This was maybe seven days into the last invasion, when they had almost finished with the air bombardments. After the *shabab* [literally, “youth”; here, resistance fighters] surrendered, the Israelis started to bulldoze houses and round up our men. Someone told us that he was right next to Jamal when he was shot.

*Yahya (Jamal's stepmother)*: We were all under the rubble. We ran from the house when the shelling started and came to the kitchen. Abu Kamal and Jamal went back to see the house and found it destroyed. Jamal and his father started to cry. I said, “Let the loss be material rather than human. Your well-being is more important than anything else.” Toward dusk, the Israelis started to call on loudspeakers for everyone under forty to come out; “Give up your weapons and you can go home safely.” The area was swarming with soldiers, and there were more than twenty tanks. Men were taken out and forced to take off their trousers right in front of our house. And Jamal was among them. The soldier asked him his name. He answered, “Jamal Issa Mahmud Sabbagh.” The soldier told him to take off his clothes. Jamal answered, “I am diabetic and can't stand the cold.” The soldier said, “You can put your things in a bag.” Jamal did and asked where he was being taken. The soldier said, “Do you know the brick factory?” Jamal said no. He said, “Someone will be with you.”

Abu Anton's son was with Jamal and saw him get killed. Jamal was killed in front of him. After they killed him, they ran over him with a tank. What was left of him wasn't more than two kilograms. His coffin was small. Our boy is gone and our house is gone. They started to bulldoze it while we were still in it. Jamal was not even on a wanted list. He never was. He was sick, a diabetic. He was completely dependent on insulin. What else can I say? Jamal was the father of two girls and a boy. His son is sick with asthma and so is his wife. We all lived together.

### Ali Mustafa Hussein Abu Sirriya

I am a forty-two-year-old teacher at the Hashimiya Coeducational School. On the second day of the invasion, at 4:00 A.M., we were sleeping in this room, when my

fourteen-year-old daughter woke me to tell me that someone was knocking at the door. I got up and opened the door and found our neighbor, the son of Jamil al-Nimr. He's fifteen. He told me, "Uncle Abu Majdi, you, your wife, and kids sit in one room. The army is behind your house, and they want to come in and search it." I had barely gathered the kids in one room when a large army dog entered. People started to scream and then the soldiers entered. They said: "Don't be afraid, we are coming to search." I said, "The house is in front of you, search it." They went to another room, and we could hear them knocking things around. They searched the kids' beds and their closets. They spent about thirty minutes. Then they came to us and said, "Take the mattresses in this room to the other room." I said, "This is a large room." They said, "We want to stay in this room. The other room has a window overlooking the street, it is dangerous for us."

We took our mattresses to the other room. They put a guard at the door and said, "No one is allowed to leave without permission. If you want food or water, you better get it now, because later you won't be able to leave." My wife got up and got some bread and sandwich meat and lebneh. I asked the boy who accompanied them, Ra'fat, whether he had been with them for very long. He said since yesterday morning. I said, "Did they feed you?" He said no. I told my wife to get him something to eat.

Between 4:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M., they didn't speak to us. At about 2:00, an officer came up to Ra'fat and me. We were sitting in the corner. One soldier told me to call him a *manyak* [fag]. I said, "Why should I say that? I won't." He said, "Do it." I said I won't. Then both of them started to beat me. One of them knocked the TV set over, but because of the mattresses, it didn't break. Under the TV I had pictures of young men who had been martyred [names them]. I figured if the soldiers come they are looking for weapons. What do they care about pictures? And I didn't expect them to find them.

There was a soldier standing there. He had broken the window and stuck his gun outside. When he saw the pictures, there was some commotion, and they told their officer. He looked at them and called over to another soldier who spoke Arabic and asked him what they were. He said, "These pictures are Hamas." So he turned to me and said, "You are Hamas." I said, "I am not Hamas or affiliated with anyone else. If I were Hamas, would you find me at home?" He insisted. I told him, "Check with your leadership. See if I am wanted, or Hamas." He said, "No, get up. We have to search the house." I said, "But you just searched the house this morning!" They left nothing at all in the closets. They found a photo album and looked it over picture by picture. They found some old pictures of my sons, then twelve and ten, posing with M16s. They asked, "Who are they?" I said, "These are my kids." They said, "Where is the M16?" I said, "This is just a picture. It costs about four or five shekels, they were excited to be getting their picture taken." They said, "You must produce this weapon right now." I said, "How can I do that? I don't have weapons." He said, "OK, then give me your ID." Until then he hadn't taken it. I gave it to him.

He started to look at us and then said, "You are missing one." I said, "What do you mean? Here are my kids." He said, "Where is your oldest son?" I said he was a student in Ramallah, in an UNRWA school. They said no. I said he was. He said, "No, your son has these weapons, he is with the fighters." I said, "My son is young, sixteen, seventeen years old." He said, "In Jenin a twelve- or fourteen-year-old carries arms." I said my son goes to school. He said, "We are here, your son will come home, and we'll shoot him on the doorstep in front of you." I said, "Do what you want. My son is not

in Jenin." They started to beat me again for about ten minutes and then told me to go to another room. I sat with Ra'fat in the other room and they left us alone.

The next morning at 9:00 A.M., a high-ranking officer appeared. One of them asked him, "Shall we take him with us? And the other one can go home." About ten minutes later, he said to me, "Get up." I asked where I was going. He said, "You're going to take us to the next house, just ten minutes, and then you can go home." I said, "I won't go with you. That is dangerous for me." He told Jamil's son, "As soon as the helicopters finish, you can go home."

When we got to the door, he held me by the neck and turned me toward the street. He was hiding behind me. When we got to Nadim's house, he shot a few rounds from my side, four or five shots when each soldier passed. They didn't enter Nadim's house but went to his neighbor's, Abu Rabi, Nasser al-Ghoul. Three hours later they said, "Get up." I said, "Where am I going? You said ten minutes." They said, "As soon as we find someone to replace you, you can go home." They said, "Go to that house. Tell the owner to put his wife and kids in one room, and we're right behind you." I went to Jamal Abu Semen's house. No one answered. They put an explosive on the door and blew it off. Then they told me to go inside. There was a second door, and they blew that open, too. Then they told me to look and see if anyone was home. The house was empty. They didn't dare go in, they sent the dog first. They told me to sit in a small room near a gas canister. Then they searched the house. I heard them knocking down a wall. They came to me and said, "See that knocked down wall? Jump into that house and go tell the people there to gather in one room." I went. It was the house of Jamal Abu Semen's father, but no one was home.

Throughout this time I was telling them that I wanted to go home, that they had said ten minutes and that it had been hours. They kept saying, "As soon as we find someone to replace you, you can go home, so stop telling us that you want to go home." Then we went to Walid Abu Semen's house, Jamal's brother. No one answered, so they broke the door down. They searched the house. By then it was 4:00 or 4:30 P.M. Then he grabbed me by the neck and took me to the home of Musa al-Ghoul. We found a group of soldiers there. I went inside and found Abu Ra'ed sitting in a room with a guard watching him. I sat with him and asked him how long he had been with them. He said, "Since morning." We started to talk about what was happening in the camp.

By 8:00 P.M., they brought plastic strips to tie our hands and feet. We said, "How are we supposed to sleep with these?" He said, "These are the orders." We said we wanted to eat; they told us they had no food. At about 11 P.M., a big officer came in; neither one of us had seen him with the soldiers earlier. Abu Ra'ed speaks Hebrew well. He told him that we had been used by the army since the morning, that the soldiers put us in danger by sending us first into homes and into streets. "We are civilians, we are innocent, and on your TV you claim you don't put civilians at risk," he said. The officer said that we would go home in the morning. We asked, "So why are we tied up? And we're hungry, we've been with them since the morning and they haven't fed us." He went to talk to the others, and then he freed our hands and feet and brought us some food.

About 9:00 the next morning, we were told to get up. They made us walk in front of them. Shots were coming from the direction of Kamal al-Sabbagh's house, so they stood us in the middle of the street. Thank God we weren't shot at. Then they made us enter the house of Yusef al-Arawi. Abu Ra'ed and I sat in the center of the house, and they exchanged fire with the *shabab*, and the soldiers sustained two or three injuries.



**A section of the bulldozed area of Jenin camp, May 2002. (Sam Costanza)**

About an hour later, I was told to get up. One group of soldiers went to Abu Ra'ed's and Abu Yusef's houses and the other group went to Abu Anis Turkman's house. They said, "Knock on the door." I knocked, and an eighteen- or nineteen-year-old girl opened the door. We went inside, and there were about fifteen families from the neighborhood in there [names them]. As soon as we entered the room, the dog entered too. They put me and the teenage girls in a small room, three-by-three meters. We started to talk about the camp, and they made me some tea and brought food. Then a soldier came to me and said, "See that house over there? Open the front door and the closets and we'll be right behind you." So I did. In the closet I found Jordanian currency. I put it in my pocket because I heard that the Israelis steal things from people's homes. I went back to the other house and I gave the money to the girls and told them to hide it for now and give it to the owner of the house later.

We continued to talk until 8:00 P.M. Then Officer Eitan came to me and said, "Get up." I started to know their names after spending so much time with them. Eitan was in charge. He took me to a corner in the house and said, "Lie on your belly." I got scared and we started to argue. I refused, and he forced me to the ground and tied my hands and feet with a piece of plastic. He asked if it was tight, and I said it was. I thought he felt sorry for me and would loosen it, but he got another piece of plastic and tightened it even more. Two soldiers carried me to where the girls were and told me, "Tell the girls we know they have a cell phone." I said, "I have been with you for two days and I haven't seen one." They said they had heard it ring. I asked the girls whether they had one and they said no. So I told the soldiers and they started to beat me. They took me back to where the girls were, and the girls started to cry. I asked them again about the cell phone, and they said they didn't have one. So the soldier said, "Tell them we'll take them to where the soldiers are and strip them until they produce it." So I told the girls, "Look, don't disgrace us. If you have a phone, give it up." One of the girls pulled out a phone from her dress. One of the soldiers took it and checked what numbers were called, and when.

I said, "Look, I want to sleep. I've been with you for two days now." He said, "You are going to stay like this until morning so that you don't double-cross us and have fighters kill us here." I said we didn't know any and didn't call any. He said, "Yes you did, you used the phone." By 12:00 midnight, I was exhausted. I told them I wanted to sleep and started to shout. He said, "You can sleep if you go where the girls are." I said, "How can I do that? They are strangers to me. In Islam we separate brothers from their sisters when they reach age ten. How can I sleep among them?" He said, "Suit yourself." Two hours later I told him again that I wanted to sleep. He said, "You can sleep on one condition. See that girl who had the cell phone? Call her a whore, and I'll let you sleep." I said, "I won't call her that, and I don't want to sleep anymore."

At 6:30 A.M., he removed the cuffs from my hands and feet and gave me a cigarette. For two days they had refused to give me a cigarette. Abu Anis's daughter made me some tea and brought me some bread and olive oil and said, "We must be patient, my brother." I sat with them until about 9:00, and then a soldier told me to get up. I said I wanted to go home. They said, "That house over there has someone in it, and if we find someone to replace you, you can go home." We went to the home of Jamal al-Shatteh. There I ran into Abu Ra'ed again, and we started to talk. I told him that last night I had slept while tied up. He said same with him and asked about the cell phone. I said it was nothing, that we hadn't even called anyone.

Anyway, we went to the home of Muhammad A., where there was a young man. The soldier told me, "Now you can go home." The man had talked to them in Hebrew, but when they finished searching the house, the soldier told me to get up. I said, "What do you mean? You said I could go home. I have to get home to my kids." He said, "This man can't walk. You can't leave until we find a replacement." So we went to the house of Mahmud Abu Kamel.

Part of the house was destroyed. There was a horse there, and they shot it before they entered. There were wires here and there so they didn't dare stay. They stood in the doorway and said to me, "See that house over there? Tell whoever you find there to stay in the middle of the house, and we'll be coming soon." I said, "Talk to the tank over there so it won't shoot me." It was less than five meters away. He said it wouldn't. I said, "What if I get hit by that tank or the helicopters?" He said he already communicated with the helicopter and the tank. Then I heard shots fired at me from Kamal al-Sabbagh's house behind the tank. On the second floor, an army unit was shooting at me and hit me in the leg. I got back to the soldier I knew, who was shouting "Stop, stop!" The soldiers followed me to the room and started to argue among themselves. I don't know Hebrew, but I understood that they were saying, "Why shoot him? He's with us." The others said, "Why didn't you say you were in this house? We didn't know." Someone came in carrying a bag and started wrapping my leg—three wraps. Four young men came in with a third unit. A second unit came in from a different direction bringing Yusef al-Falah and his two sons and Kamal al-Sabbagh's son. The guys carried me. When we had gone a ways, I asked where they were taking me. They said, "To the mosque. The army said to take you there." I asked why. They said, "Where should we take you, then?" I said, "How about to this house?" They did and then were afraid to return.

I stayed at the Abu Remesh home for four days. They gave me a shirt and trousers. My leg was still bleeding a lot when I came. They tied it and had to keep changing the wraps, because I bled through them. By noon, it was very swollen. After the second day, I stopped bleeding. The army went through with loudspeakers telling everyone to leave the camp, that they were going to demolish it.

The people I was staying with were afraid and wanted to leave and asked me what I wanted to do. Theirs was the first house on the block. The Israelis had already bulldozed the home of Nayef Abu Ghosh and the homes of his sons. They bulldozed the houses to make a street about ten meters wide— it used to be two meters. I told them, “Your house is now the first house on the block. If they bulldoze it, there I go. So take me with you.” They made white flags. Abu Ashraf and his sons carried me. Their neighbor was Abu Louay. When the army bulldozed his home, they brought him to Abu Ashraf’s house. So he helped carry me, too. I told them to take me anywhere. As we left, we started calling out to all the homes we passed, until we got to Abu Anwar Damaj’s house, and they came out. Their sons carried me inside. When we sat down his wife asked if I was hungry. I said I hadn’t eaten in four days, that I was starving. Their bathroom was destroyed, and they had girls in the house, so I was embarrassed to take a shit. I needed two people to carry me there. For four days I hadn’t eaten just so that I wouldn’t need a bathroom. When I needed to urinate, the boy brought me an empty container, and I covered myself with a blanket.

Yasir al-Ghoul, our neighbor, walked in. I asked him what was happening. He said there wasn’t any fighting here on this hill, just a lot of searching, homes destroyed, and doors removed. I said, “If you can still get around, call my brothers.” My mother, brothers, and their wives came and they cried to see me alive. They took me home, and the next day my brother went to the Red Crescent and said we needed an ambulance to get me out. They said, “You must be crazy. Birds can’t get into the camp, let alone an ambulance. The streets are full of martyrs, and they’ve been lying there for days. We’ve been getting calls from people with head and chest injuries, and we can’t do anything for them. The Red Cross isn’t able to get to them.” So my brother called to tell us this. He said that if there was any way to carry me on a ladder or door to the outskirts of the camp, any car could pick me up and take me to the hospital. They put me on a ladder and carried me to the edge of the camp. There was one martyr with me and six or seven injured people.

The *shabab* were standing around, and they stopped a driver and told him, “We have some martyrs and some injured people here. Take them to the hospital.” He said, “How can I? There is a tank at the entrance, and if any of the injured are on Israel’s wanted list, they’ll take them.” But he took us to Rajih Hospital, and there were journalists there. They were too scared to go into the camp. I saw CNN journalists, American journalists, Italian journalists, maybe twenty TV correspondents. I said, “Treat me first, and then I’ll talk to the journalists.” So they sent the journalists elsewhere and put some iodine on my leg. I said, “Why are you putting iodine? I was shot and all you are doing is putting iodine?” He said, “Look at your X-ray. You have about forty pieces of shrapnel in your leg.” I said that I had been shot only once, and he said that this was the kind of bullet that explodes within the body, my leg was infected, and they may have to amputate. I said, “What will I do without a leg?” He suggested waiting and seeing whether the infection went away, and I said fine. They took me upstairs, and the journalists started arriving to ask about the camp. [The leg improved, and according to UNRWA doctors, it would be all right in a month or so.]

### **Hind Ali Oweiss**

I don’t really remember the date or what day of the week it was. We were at home when the Israelis entered the area; it was maybe the second or third day when they came in, completely crazy. They said, “Get out of your house.” I said, “Where should

we go? We don't want to leave." There were about ten to fourteen of us at home—my daughters and their children and other people as well. The Israelis came at dusk, but I didn't leave. Our house was three storeys, and there were stores on the ground floor. They put us in one room and took over the rest of the house. The next day, they told us to leave again, and I said I didn't want to go. Where can I go? I intended to stay put in my home and on our land. A soldier grabbed my two-year-old grandson under his arm and put a gun to his head and said, "If you don't leave I'll shoot the boy." He spoke in heavily accented Arabic. I tried to grab the boy, and he hit me in the head with the gun. There were maybe fifty soldiers in the house, completely insane. I said I would leave. They seemed crazy enough to kill, so I took the child and we went and stayed in a neighbor's house. The next day, or maybe the day after, we had no milk for the child. So I went out to get some. A soldier shot in my direction and shouted, "Go back, go back!" I said I needed to get some milk for the child. But he wouldn't hear of it, so I had to go back.

I am the sort of person who likes to see what is going on. I am not a fearful person. I saw the army with a group of our men, making them strip and throwing their clothes to the side—so many men they couldn't be counted. They stripped them in the heat and killed some. I saw this with my own eyes. Among the men was Jamal al-Sabbagh. They riddled him with bullets right in front of my house. They hadn't yet bulldozed my house when that happened. They stayed in our house for five days. When they killed and arrested the men they wanted, they burned our house, dynamited it, and then bulldozed it.

When Jamal al-Sabbagh was killed, they told our men, "Put him in front of this house." But then they threw him in the street, and a tank ran over him. They completely minced him. Words don't begin to convey what I saw. I saw him alive, and then I saw him minced. They took one of my blankets to cover him, and they put him over there. This is the kind of savagery that we in the camp experienced at the hands of Sharon.

Another act of savagery concerns Abu Jandal. I was going to get milk for my grandson. I saw him through a crack in the door. The houses around us had been bulldozed, but ours hadn't been at that time. I saw Abu Jandal with the soldiers, and his arms were raised. I saw them hit him. They tied him up. And then they shot him from up close, not even one and a half meters. Three days later, we left home at about noon or late morning, and he was still there where they shot him. Someone got in touch with his family, and told them, we congratulate you on the martyrdom of Abu Jandal. What we saw here, your pen is incapable of recording.

### **Mariam Juma' Saleh 'Amer**

When the bombing started, we were asleep. I don't remember the date. The bombs fell on the trees and the garden. I started to shake. There was shouting, "Get out, get out!" We couldn't. We moved from room to room. There were my son's nine children, all of them young, and my four daughters. For six days there was shelling all around us. We couldn't leave. If we did, they would shoot us. The soldiers passed right behind our house. We went to my son's house. After a while, I thought I'd go back to my own house. But I was afraid. At about 8:00 A.M., six or seven soldiers came to my house. They were dark, not white. There were shouts from my son's house, and I heard an ambulance. I thought, "They've come for my son." The soldiers left, and I thought, "God, I hope they don't return." I didn't know what they did when they



entered my house, and fear overtook me. They went to my son's house and started firing. I peed in my pants, and my throat went dry. I had no idea what to do. I was afraid that all my children were dead and that only I remained. I went to get milk from the neighbor and I thought, my son Mahmud will be coming soon. He came later in the afternoon, and he was limping. I said, "What's wrong with you?" He said, "nothing," and went outside near the trees. I followed him. I said, "For God's sake don't go out, you'll be killed," but he limped away.

My daughters went to the hospital to look for my son. I followed them a little later, as soon as I could. At the hospital, they told me that they sent my son and daughters to Nablus Hospital. I figured my son was dead. My husband was with me. I said I wanted to go to Nablus right away. He said there wasn't any traffic anywhere. I said, "I must see Mahmud." We went the next day. I saw him. He was unconscious, not aware of mother or sister. His sisters and I stayed with him. Then he was transferred to Jericho. So my husband and I went to Jericho. The soldiers stopped our driver. They took his ID and his keys and put his car in a ditch. So we were stuck; we couldn't go back to Jenin or forward to Jericho. A truck came by. We hitched a ride to Jericho, only to find that Mahmud had been transferred. He is now in Jordan. We were told that he doesn't eat, he doesn't move, nothing.

### **Bahia Salama Odeh Turki**

We were four families in a single room. The soldiers didn't talk to us. Then they saw the picture of my son the martyr. One asked me if my kids were twins. I said no. He said, "All of you get inside." We did. The soldier wanted to sleep, and he did, right here. He put his gun next to his head. I am not afraid of them; I worked in Israel for a long time. They told us to go to another room. We did.

Then someone came and said to leave, that we had no business there. I said, "Where can we go? This is our home." We started to argue— him telling me to leave, me saying I wouldn't. He had someone with him whose face was darkened. By the time we got upstairs they set fire to the downstairs room. My home was full of stuff, and it burned for some time. They lit it deliberately, and some shells also hit the house. For fifty-three years I have been working and putting into this house. My children were young when their father died; I raised all seven of them by working in an autopsy room in Israel. And now, at the end of the day, look at what they did.

They stayed here two days and two nights. We slept with them in the house. There were about ten in my house, ten in Mahmud's house, and ten at the neighbor's. They were all over. They made holes in the walls to get to the neighbors. All told, my son who died had about seventeen people that he is responsible for.

The one whose face was darkened I think was Arab. His accent was not Israeli and not Arab like us. And there is no one worse than them.

### **Fathi Saleh Abdullah Shalabi**

I am the father of Waddah Fathi Saleh Abdullah Shalabi, and I am sixty-three years old. My son Waddah was thirty-six years old. He worked as a handyman in a Hittin school. The second martyr was 'Abd al-Karim Yusef Saadi, twenty-seven years old. He got married six months ago.

On Saturday, 6 April at 6:00 P.M., the army came to Abu Abed's house here. Mine is the third house. The army was searching houses. They finished here and moved on to the house of Abu Omar, my immediate neighbor. There were seventeen people in my

house, including 'Abd al-Karim. My son Waddah has six kids; the oldest is ten years old and the youngest four months. They were all at my house. When the army came to this area, they ordered everyone down to the courtyard in front of the house. They had their guns pointed at us. My son Waddah was carrying his four-month-old son, Mahmud. 'Abd al-Karim was carrying Waddah's eighteen-month-old daughter. When we got here, the soldier asked in Hebrew, "Who's in charge?" I said I was. He motioned to us, and we got closer. The soldier on this side told my son to give the baby to his mother. 'Abd al-Karim put the little girl down too. They put all the women and children in one room in 'Abd al-Karim's house. Who does that leave? Me and 'Abd al-Karim and Waddah. The soldier in command, who was called Gaby, told us to raise our arms and they frisked us. The Israelis can check our names in the computer; I defy them to find anything on us.

Suddenly, one soldier told the other, "Shoot them." They had M16s and shot. I fell on that pipe over there on my face. Some of the soldiers heard the shots and ran over. They asked, "Why did you shoot them? They didn't do anything." The soldier responded, "Gaby ordered me to." When we were shot, the soldiers knocked down the wall between my house and Abu Omar's. Abu Omar was standing over there, him and his daughters. He was moved to where the seventeen women and children were and he told them we had been martyred. But they were afraid to come out, because there was a sniper on that house over there, and they had a guard at this entrance. One of the soldiers had a small flashlight and pointed it at me to see whether I was alive or dead. I was lying down on the ground here, pretending to be dead. The ground is uneven, so their blood was flowing on me. When I was finally able to change my clothes, I wrung blood from them. The soldiers were stepping over us to get to the houses they searched. After about an hour and a half, the soldier over there went inside and closed the door behind him. I wanted to get to my son, who was only twenty centimeters away. I wanted to move my neck when I heard two soldiers come up. They went through that gate, and when I heard the latch, I moved Waddah's head and knew he was dead. 'Abd al-Karim had been killed instantly, my son maybe two or three minutes after. I crawled over the destroyed wall between my house and Abu Omar's and made my way home. Finally, I changed my clothes and put my old clothes in a bag behind the door.

I was afraid. The soldiers knew there were three dead men, and if they found only two, they might look for me and execute me. I climbed a tree to get to a nearby rooftop and sat there for about ten minutes while the helicopters were bombing. I went to the rooftop of my other son's house, but he wasn't there. The door was locked, so I knew the Israelis hadn't entered. His roof connects with Abu Omar's roof so I entered Abu Omar's house. From the window, I could see Abu Abed cover the two dead men with blankets. I spent over an hour in Abu Omar's stairwell, afraid that the soldiers would come after me. I went inside my home and locked the door and was there about an hour when I heard Abu Abed and Umm Omar and her daughter. I opened the door and Abu Abed said, "What? Are you alive?" I asked what had happened at his place. He said, "There was shooting, and the soldiers were afraid, but we don't know."

I went and stayed with them for two or three days. On the fourth day, a tank came by and announced that all camp residents had to leave to save their lives, etc. Waddah's wife said, "No way will I leave without seeing my husband." So she went, and they lifted the blanket off his face, and then she and the women and the children started to cry and scream. A sniper on a nearby rooftop started to shoot. He couldn't

see us, but he could hear the shouting. So everyone withdrew to my house and from there to the main road. We had almost reached the mosque when there was another announcement that everyone has to go to the *muqata'a* [square]. Instead, I went a different route. There were civil defense people there, and I told them I wanted to go to my sister's house in Kharroub [a nearby village]. We went there and spent nine or ten days. When we heard that the army left the camp, we came back. We asked about our dead, and people told us that they had just been removed by the municipality a day or two earlier, which means that they stayed about eight or nine days on the ground, just where they were killed. So we went to the government hospital and found their bodies there. We buried them north of the hospital. We put them in bags in a temporary grave. This was on 18 April, a Thursday. The next day, after the Friday noon prayers, we removed the bags and reburied all the martyrs together, each properly identified. We buried them in the Jenin refugee camp cemetery. I don't know how many there were— maybe thirty or forty. I didn't count.

Waddah was a good boy. No one ever had reason to be upset with him.

### **Mahmud Rashid Fayed**

We were at home when the Israelis came with a bulldozer to widen the road for large tanks. They knocked out homes until they reached my brother's house, which was right next to mine. They demolished his house, but one room remained intact. My brother and his kids came to stay with me. The Israelis hadn't yet gotten to my house. We were sitting when the bulldozer came. It hit the corner, and the house started to shake, and the two pillars near the door and the wall started to crumble. We ran out and told them that there was a handicapped person in the house who couldn't walk. They said, "Bring him out." We took him with us to the remaining room in my brother's house, and then they destroyed our house. Then a rocket was shot into the room we were in— a burst of flame. My sister-in-law was slightly injured and we ran out, but the handicapped man stayed behind. We couldn't carry him.

The soldiers took me and my nephews and detained us until about 9:00 P.M. Then they said, "Go." We said, "How can we go? There is shooting and soldiers all around, and it is dark. We'd better stay here with you." They said, "No. Go." So we started to walk, and after a short distance, we reached a house that had been bulldozed. So we went to the Jabha house. I called, "I am Abu Khalid, with Abu Abdullah. Let us in." They did, and we slept until morning.

The next day, the bulldozer came and started to destroy that house. We ran outside to the courtyard. The soldiers said, "Wait a while." Then they made a phone call to their superiors, and they said, "You had better leave the camp. We are going to destroy the whole thing." We left. We passed by a house next to ours, and all the women in the neighborhood were in it because it was still intact. The handicapped man remained in the room. Then the bulldozer came and started destroying it. The women ran out, four of them, and they had a man with them who spoke Hebrew. A piece of masonry had trapped the handicapped man inside, but he was still visible. People went up to the man in the bulldozer, and he said that the woman could approach and get him out but the man had to step back. The woman approached and said, "Jamal, Jamal!" and for the first time in his entire life, he spoke, "Oh God, oh God, oh God!" There are witnesses. We tried to get a bulldozer to uncover him, but we never found him. The room was destroyed. People said that he was turned over with the rubble from the bulldozer that turned the whole room upside down and that his body was

broken into pieces. Later, we got a bulldozer to remove the rubble and try to find him, but we couldn't. The Israeli bulldozer brought rubble from other places and piled it up here, so the whole site is mixed up.

### **Khalid Abu 'Eita**

The Israelis invaded on 1 or 2 April. The events I am relating happened on the third day. It was a Friday, at about 8:00 A.M. My three brothers and my sister-in-law and I were at home. Our neighbor knocked on our door and told us to leave, and we did. A lot of soldiers were surrounding the house. The soldiers asked us to lift our shirts and turn around. They checked our ID cards and searched us but found nothing. I spoke to them in Hebrew. The man with them did not speak Hebrew, so when they discovered that I could, they asked me to stand aside. They said, "We want you to help us. We are going to search your homes, and you can come with us." He told me to open the door to my house. I did, and they searched it room by room. They acted like they would shoot if anything moved. I said this to the soldier, and he told the others that it was OK, that the house was safe. So they relaxed a bit.

We moved to the next house. The search took about half an hour. As soon as we entered a house, a whole unit would appear for the search—I don't know where they came from. They searched my father's house, which was exposed, with balconies. This scared them, so they had soldiers standing guard in the back. Then we went to my brother's place, which was on the second floor. They searched it somewhat crazily. They panicked easily. I tried to stay calm to make them less agitated. The same process was repeated with every place we entered. Whenever they didn't want me to hear what they were saying, one soldier would take me away.

At my father's house, I found that all of my family had been gathered in my bedroom. I told the soldiers, "We can't all sit in this room. We want to sit in the other room." They agreed. They were there from 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. My brother's children were young and started to get restless and cry. The officer said he couldn't do anything, that we had to stay in this room. They also took my brother's place as a kind of command post. They had lots of maps with them.

At about 4:00 P.M., they announced they were leaving. They called me, my two brothers, and another young man with them. They said, "Khalid, put shoes on." The commanding officer took the young Palestinian, and he left with many soldiers, walking ahead of them as they went from house to house. Then it was my turn, and the officer said, "Khalid, go." So I walked out ahead, and then he said I had to stay closer to him. We went forty meters and entered another house, where there were already soldiers. And the story repeated itself, each group with an escort. We would go to a house, spend about an hour, and when they had rested and organized themselves, we would move again. We were in exposed areas. We went to the fourth house—same thing: soldiers already there, all the residents in one room, no one daring to breathe. By then I was familiar with the situation, so I tried to reassure them. I said, "Don't be afraid. They've been here since morning, and so far they haven't harmed anyone."

When they left this family, they asked me to accompany a unit called Igoz, the special assault forces. They said, "Khalid, we want you to follow our instructions to the letter. You must move in the direction we move: left, left, right, right." I said fine. We went about ten meters, and there was a low wall about eighty centimeters high. They took position there. We were approaching an exposed area. It took about twenty minutes for the troops to move from one area to another. I had no idea where

I was going. We walked between trees and then approached a house. I saw that they had marked it with a red circle on their map. I didn't know whose house it was. The officer was next to a tree, and I was on his other side. He told me to knock on the door, which I did, but no one answered. So he gave the order to withdraw and to approach the house from the rear. He stuck an explosive device in the door and blew it up, and then he told me to enter the house quickly. His gun was in back of me. He pushed me in. Every room he entered, I entered first. I started to get really scared. They didn't find anything in the house, but they started deliberately destroying the furnishings. They abused people's possessions. When they came across small things they liked, they took them—for example, a cigarette lighter on the stove, a backpack in a closet. They didn't stay long in this house and asked me to go to the next house.

There appeared to be fighters there, and I was afraid I would get caught in the middle. I told him, "You are exposing my life to danger." He said, "No, I am protecting your life more than you are." I said, "You're protecting me by putting me in front of you? Why don't you walk ahead of me? You are armed; I'm not. I'm a civilian." He said, "Just do what I say." I knocked on the door, and Tareq, a man I know, answered the door. I said, "I have the army with me, and they want you to leave the house." The family was in the stairwell, and there were children. When the children heard me mention "army," they started to cry. Tareq was with his brother-in-law, and the soldiers told them to raise their hands, lift their shirts, and take off their trousers. Then they took them to an apartment upstairs and blindfolded and handcuffed them. They entered the place gradually, in pairs, until they had complete control. Then they started to search closets, the refrigerator, the attic.

These events all took place in one day. Each search took an hour or more. I was with them the whole day, from the time they came to my home until about 7:00 or 8:00 that night. They moved on to the next house. I was afraid there might be fighters, and I said I wouldn't enter. The officer insisted. He had his rifle on my shoulder, and I thought, if he shoots I'll lose my hearing. When I objected to entering, he assumed maybe I knew something particular about the house. So they broke the grill on the window and told me to enter. I told the soldier, "I beg you, let me walk freely. I have to be able to defend myself if something happens." He said, "No, you have to do this and other things too." So we entered and went from room to room. They were on edge when they entered a house and seemed relieved when the door finally opened. They told each other in Hebrew, "Neqe," which means clean. They searched the place thoroughly and then left. They finished their mission and started to retreat until we reached the house we started out from. Then they told me I was good and could go home.

These events occurred in the beginning of the invasion. The Igoz forces are very well trained. Not all of them were armed. One of them had a gun strapped to his right leg and a knife on the left leg, the kind used by commandos. They don't all carry the same weapons, either; some carry light weapons. Some of them also wear regular shoes like us, not army boots. These are in the front, but in the rear are the regular soldiers.

The area they entered with me had pretty much fallen anyway. It had been taken on the first day, and soldiers had taken up positions there. I saw them shoot but didn't see anyone fall. They communicated with the helicopters. They were quiet and talked to each other with hand signals. Sometimes, I heard them say that they were in a dangerous area, and they claimed to have found a weapons-manufacturing place. But I didn't see them find anything. They entered ordinary houses, with children in them,

and they destroyed things as they wished. Even my house, once they finished with it, one of the soldiers didn't like a glass buffet I had and kicked it, breaking all the glass. They did that in every house, breaking the glass— it was standard procedure. All you can hope for is your personal safety. The day they came to my house, I had taken my children and wife to her parents' village, but I felt a need to stay here. I feel strongly about the place. My brothers left, but I didn't want to. I felt that what happens is fated anyway, and I can't escape it.

## BETHLEHEM

### Muhammad Mahmud (a pseudonym)

On the first day of the invasion, I was at home with my wife and our four children. There was some shooting in our neighborhood, between the army and the *shabab*. There wasn't much resistance, though, nothing to account for the large number of Israeli soldiers. There is a nunnery next door, and the Israelis entered it because some fighters had sought sanctuary there. At about 4:00 or 4:30 A.M., there was a knock on the door. I answered the door. My wife followed me to protect me and to show that this was a home. It was a Tuesday, and it might have been 2 April.

The soldier said, "Get out." There may have been twenty or twenty-five soldiers. He told me to raise my arms and lift my shirt. He said to turn off my cell phone. He took my ID card and then gave it to my wife. He asked me about the nunnery, and I told him where it was. Then they said, "You come with us." They took me to the road and put me against a wall and made me raise my arms again. They said, "You are a liar. You are not a good person. You know where the fighters are." They sat me on the ground and assigned a sniper to watch me. It was raining steadily. The sniper said, "I'm going to shoot you now." I said, "Go ahead." Then I said, "I testify that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is His prophet." They hit me against the wall, asking me about this or that person. I said, "I don't know. What do you want? All I have are my children." I was in my pajamas. They fired some bullets not too far above my head. I was the first one arrested, and then they got others. They made us stay there for half an hour and then moved us to another neighborhood. They handcuffed us and took some young men from the neighborhood, none of them fighters.

Some of the soldiers were humane, some not. They put us in a house they had taken over. They brought a doctor who said, "If anyone needs anything, we'll get it." One of the men had a stomach condition, and they gave him something for it. We sat there for an hour or so. Then they moved us somewhere else. The street was full of tanks. They were taking pictures of us for their own use. There were about eleven or twelve of us detained, and they loaded six of us in a tank. One of the soldiers who took me from my home saw me in the tank and said, "Bring him down. I took him from his home, and I didn't take his ID card so that he could go back home." He spoke Arabic just like me or even better. He apologized and said, "I am worried about you. There is a sniper on the rooftop, and he shoots at anything that moves." He put me in a jeep and took me to Bayt Jala. We were there for about an hour, and then they got us a bus and took us to a camp called Kefar 'Asyon.

It was bitter cold there, and we were subjected to insults along the way. They put us in an aluminum-type hut and sat us on the floor, and we were handcuffed. Instead of calling someone by name, they referred to us by number. There were twelve of us, and each one had a number. I was number 2. It was about midnight by then. We were

freezing. They searched us and took away anything we had, like cigarettes and lighters. After about an hour, they took us to an interrogation room. They asked, “If the *tanzim* came to you, what would you do?” I said I wouldn’t get involved. My interrogation started with social questions like, How many kids do you have? What do you do for a living? Where do you work? Do you have a magnetic card? The card is like a Visa card; it shows that you have no security offenses. With it, you can go to Jerusalem. It is like a certificate of good conduct. Then they went through the official procedures of registering my name and ID card number and taking my fingerprints. Then they brought a doctor in to see if anyone was sick. All this happened while I was still handcuffed. Then they blindfolded us and put us in a room. We sat on the floor, blindfolded and handcuffed and still wet from being out in the rain. They turned the air conditioning on, and the door was open. There were about twelve of us and three guards standing over us. They would approach if anyone so much as moved. We were not allowed to lie down or move. I was handcuffed for three days. My hands became pretty swollen.

I spent the first night like that. I worried about my back, because there was no relief, and it was very cold. To go to the bathroom, we had to ask for help, because we were handcuffed. A guard would have to unzip my pants—insults all the time. The guard would trip us to get a laugh at our expense.

The next day, that’s how we were, with no food and no water. Actually, I didn’t really feel very hungry in such circumstances. But I had a pack of cigarettes, and I asked for a light. The guard said no. I said I had to use the bathroom, and the guard went with me. He stayed with me, and the door was open. Finally, I said, “Take me back. I can’t use the bathroom like this.” Finally, he agreed to undo my handcuffs long enough for me to finish, but he wouldn’t close the door.

Finally, they brought us some food. They agreed to remove the blindfolds, but we were supposed to eat while we were handcuffed. They brought lebaneh, apples, and tomatoes. I ate little, just so that I wouldn’t have to go to the bathroom.

They moved all twelve of us to another place. It was outdoors, and we could hear gunfire all the time. It was drafty, and we had to sit on the ground, which was wet from the rain. We were there from 3:00 P.M. until midnight. Then they moved us to a barracks with aluminum siding and broken glass on the ground. We were still handcuffed. They brought a portable toilet. The guards were regular army; they weren’t trained with how to deal with prisoners. They acted as though they were in a battle. They had never heard of the Geneva Conventions or prisoners’ rights. At about 9:30 P.M., they brought a thin black blanket, but with a wet floor and wet clothes and your feet in slippers, the blanket doesn’t really help. They brought in another ten guys or so, all people we knew from another neighborhood. There was a sixty-year-old man with us from the Palestinian Authority. It never occurred to them that he was an elderly person—they handcuffed him just like the rest of us.

We were about twenty of us, and eating took a couple of hours, because they wouldn’t let us eat all at once. We had to eat two at a time.

They kept three who had records. They put the rest of us in a vehicle for transporting soldiers and said they were sending us to Lebanon. But instead, they took us to Bayt Jala and let us go, saying that we’d better run home or they would shoot us. I said, “How are we supposed to get home? There are snipers on the rooftops.” He said, “May you die. Go home.” Luckily, I have a niece in Bayt Jala. I told the guys with me that they could come along, but they refused. My niece and her husband took me in. I spent four days with them; I couldn’t get home earlier. Bethlehem was still under

curfew, and I didn't have my ID card. My niece had a cell phone, so I was able to get word to my family and to the families of the guys who had been released with me that we were all OK. I found out that they had entered my house looking for weapons. They tore the house apart and damaged the doors and broke the iron grilling on the windows. Our neighbor is an older woman, and she was petrified when they knocked on her door.

### **Elias Musa Kanaan**

Early in the invasion, they entered my house. They pounded on the door and I opened it. They said: "Raise your arms and get on the floor!" My wife and daughters came out to see what was going on. A soldier told them not to say a word. They took everything out of the closets and the refrigerator. They didn't leave anything in place. I said, "The kids are young." They were crying, and he wanted me to quiet them, which I did. They left, but fifteen minutes later, they came back to take me. I told my wife, "I am not coming back." I gave her my ID card and some money and went down the stairs. One of the soldiers asked whom these houses belonged to. I said, they were my sister's and brother's. I knocked on my sister's door and told her, "Open the door. I am your brother Elias, and I have soldiers with me." Then they broke everything.

Before I knew it, I was shot in the finger and leg. I said, "Why did you shoot me? I have been doing what you told me to." Another soldier asked him why he had shot me, and they left me there. About forty-five minutes later, my sister's daughter-in-law Dalal came out to get something and told her, "Aunt, someone is moaning." I was bleeding profusely from both injuries and couldn't say anything. They took me inside and bound my leg and kept changing the wraps, but I kept bleeding for eight and a half hours. Then my temperature dropped; I got cold and blue, and I said my good-byes. But the bleeding slowed down. During this time, my cousins were trying to get me an ambulance, and when one came to collect the dead, they put me on top of two dead people, and one dead person was next to me. I was afraid we would be shelled, so I said my prayers again. But we made it to the hospital, and they assisted me.

I was destined to live. After bleeding for eight and a half hours, I was meant to live to continue to provide for my kids. I am a craftsman. I work with shells, and I depend on my fingers for my livelihood. I don't have any feeling in them now, and I don't know if they will get any better. Who will feed my children if I don't?

### **Amal al-Hajj**

Early in the invasion, the *shabab* were all in the neighborhood. We were all hiding here, and the planes were bombing, and so were the tanks. My sisters and I hid behind the closet because the shelling was so fierce. When things quieted down a bit, we went downstairs. By then, the army had surrounded the area, and they had taken our neighbor's sons. They arrested them and beat them up. They handcuffed them and took them to a detention center. One of our neighbors got shot in the arm and leg. The next day, ten or fifteen soldiers entered my house. This was about 7:30 A.M. The children were still sleeping, and they were very frightened to see the soldiers. They searched the house. They didn't steal anything, but we were afraid. There were about twenty-seven of us here in this house. We were under siege for fifteen days, and we ran out of food. We had a twenty-day-old girl in the house, and we ran out of milk for her.



Later, they came again looking for weapons. They rounded up all the men in the neighborhood and took them away, and my brother Nidal was among them. They took him with them to look for weapons. They beat him up, too. They kept him for about seven to eight hours, using him as a human shield as they looked for weapons.

They searched our house maybe four times. Some of the soldiers were especially nasty. Nidal's wife's family lives next door, and her brothers were arrested and detained for about ten days. They arrested all the men in our neighborhood. If you looked out the window, you could get shot. This went on for fifteen days. There was some resistance in our neighborhood. We could see those martyred and injured. Rain-water was reddened with the blood of those who fell. No ambulances were allowed to reach us.

Two planes were bombing us; tanks didn't come, because the alleys are too narrow. In our area alone, maybe thirty men were killed, not to mention the injured. When we saw them, everyone helped load them into the ambulance; we put them on top of one another—the injured on top of the dead.

Some of the soldiers who entered our house spoke Arabic. The ones who entered the first time spoke with a Lebanese accent. They searched us again when they got the list of names of those inside the Church of the Nativity, and they realized that these were not the men they wanted.

### **Muhammad al-Jabr**

The Israelis invaded Bethlehem and came to the neighborhood I live in. We were afraid. I was out getting stuff at the time, and about ten of us sought refuge in the church. There were about 250 in all inside the church. At first, getting in and out of the church was easy. But we didn't expect that things would go on for so long. We thought that America and Europe, which are Christian countries, would get involved. We thought this place was important for Christians since it is for Muslims too, as the birthplace of Christ, peace be upon Him.

By the second day, we were getting hungry and so we started to look for food. Among those in the church were members of the PA [Palestinian Authority] and others from other organizations. They had food with them; fighters carry their rations. So they split their food with us, and we ate what was available. We thought we would be going home in two or three days, but the siege continued, and the Israeli grip on the church got stronger. So the *shabab* tried to get some food from the priests. In the beginning, they provided some food. The first meal we had from them was macaroni with a bit of sauce, not very red, mainly white and not well-cooked—it was doughy. Day after day, the food became more and more scarce.

As the food diminished, so did the water. Some *shabab* were shot and bleeding, and our psychological distress grew. We saw people bleeding, and we couldn't offer them any aid. They may or may not be on Israel's wanted list, but we were supposed to turn them over—but what would happen to them? The Israelis might finish them off.

Every day, the situation got worse. The church has wells that were no longer used. When you get water from those wells, you see worms swimming around. But the real problem was that the wells were exposed. And the Israelis had snipers overlooking them. One man, Isam al-Jawabrah, was shot in the leg when he was at the well getting water and bled to death.

We slept on the hard floor, so you wake up in the morning and your body is broken. Three of us had to use the same cover. Those who weren't shot by the Israelis might be sick, an ulcer or something. Eventually, there was no food, and we went outdoors and picked khubayza [an edible wild herb], which was fine. Then we went to grass. I bet you that if anyone looks, he won't find any grass in the church courtyard. We used to collect the leaves from a lemon tree, cut them finely, and fry them over a *buboor* [kerosene camping burner]. We were passing blood in our urine because our stomachs were scraped raw. You're trapped there for forty days, and if you walk out the door, you get shot. But we had a will to stay alive. As a civilian, I wanted to stay in the church. If there are wanted men, I wanted to stay with them; they are from the Bethlehem district, and they are the sons of Palestine. They are no terrorists. The person who defends his country is no terrorist. The terrorist is the person who wants to occupy our country. That is the truth that kept us going.

There was a real sense of brotherhood in the church. There were people among us from Islamic and political organizations, and there was no conflict at all. After a few weeks, you're psychologically stressed, especially those who were wanted by the Israelis, and there was talk of exile. This would make them angry, especially when they'd remember their wives and kids, so they might snap at someone. But a few minutes later, they'd come to apologize. That's what life was like in the church.

We had no electricity and no water, and we were cut off from news. We had cell phones at first, so we could phone friends and family and ask for news. But when the Israelis cut the electricity, you couldn't charge the phones. Sometimes you would hear someone crying. Often we couldn't sleep. The Israelis blasted us with recordings of screaming. Your head would feel like it was going to explode. You couldn't block out the sound.

After about thirty days, our suffering was at its worst. We knew there were negotiations going on. The negotiator, Antony Salman, was in the church, going back and forth, and everyone waited for him to return with some news. Sometimes, he would be gone for five hours, and the *shabab* would say, "Tell us, Abu George, what is going on?" And he would say that the negotiations were a failure. We wanted him to lie to us, to give us some hope so that our morale would improve. He was upset with us because we were complaining, so there was bickering between us.

I want to mention a point of divine grace, and we consider that this happened because we are with God, and God is with us. One day, we woke up and were told there was no food so we should be prepared to eat a bit of salt with our water. Some of us went outside into a courtyard, to a lemon tree, and a pigeon flew by and landed on a low wall. One of the guys said, "God, if only we could capture it and eat it." And, by the grace of God, the pigeon flew to the guys and more or less surrendered to them. If you took that pigeon and fed it to a ten-year-old child, you'd need to add some rice and some soup to make a meal of it, but that day, twenty-five of us feasted on it. Each of us had a tiny morsel. We didn't want to wash our hands, we wiped them on our pants, just to hold onto the smell. It really improved our morale.

We would have been more patient had we known that our patience would result in something better than the exile of thirteen men to Italy and twenty-six to Gaza. Pressure to give in came from several directions: the 140,000 residents under siege, the church itself under siege, the food shortage. Every day you lose a martyr or see blood or say goodbye to a friend—I should have mentioned that after twenty days, our numbers went down from 220 to about 150; we lost some martyrs, and some of the wounded or sick as well as the women and children were evacuated. And you are

really affected by the people who decide they want to surrender, that they can't stay any longer with you. Specifically, I mention someone on the security committee or the civilian committee who said, "I'm not willing to suffer like this for another ten days. If you are a nationalist, that is your business." About fifty or so were saying they wanted to surrender. Who does that leave? Mainly the ones who were wanted by the Israelis. There may have been other factors too that the wanted men knew about that I didn't. Some of the *shabab* were crying. Some were going to Italy and some to Gaza. Everyone in the church expected to be exiled, even the civilians. I'm a civilian, but I was afraid I'd find my name on one of those lists. But we had to accept because of the 140,000 residents of Bethlehem.

As for the priests, we appreciated that they were sharing their food with us. Some of the *shabab* broke into rooms, not as the press reported, but to look for food. We were hearing from families who said, food is entering the church, are the priests feeding you? It might happen that they hadn't that day, and we would say so. This would affect us. We thank them for what they did, but they probably could have done more. The Greek Orthodox did share their food with us; we are so grateful to them. After them came the Catholics. The Armenians did not have much sense of nationalism.

We are grateful to the ten or so internationals who came. They are much better than their governments. They entered when we were down because we had no food. They brought some rice, which was good because we were hungry.

When we left the church, we didn't feel we had been defeated. We did not agree to be searched or to lift our shirts for the Israelis—this was an important point of pride for us. But that's what happened. I had expected to go home once I left the church. I didn't expect to be asked by an Israeli soldier what I did and then to be left in a bus for five hours. A guard is standing over you telling you what to do, and the soldiers cursed at and hit some of us. This was not what we agreed to. We had agreed to go home directly from the church. We didn't even agree to be asked for identification. But there were many concessions. We were told there would be a Palestinian official at the camp, but there wasn't. They took us to the 'Asyoun camp. Two or three men still haven't come home. They are still in 'Asyoun. What happened to the agreement, to the U.S. and European guarantees? When I finally got home, the families of the men who didn't come home were crying. These things affect you.

I want to send a message to the world. We have not been bowed. On the contrary, Palestine will be restored. They can lay siege on us for forty days, sixty days, exile us to Europe and Gaza. We want to live in freedom, in a state, with holy Jerusalem as its capital. There is no substitute. I lost twelve kilograms in the forty days, but for the sake of Palestine and Palestinians living in freedom, I am willing to offer myself, not just twelve kilograms of my flesh.

## NABLUS

### **Ghassan Hamdan (physician, Medical Relief Committees)**

We noticed that when the Israelis entered Ramallah and other areas, they divided the city into sections with no communication between them. So we tried to set up several field hospitals in different parts of the city; the primary goal of these centers was to give emergency help until patients could be transferred to the main hospital in Nablus. When the Israelis entered the city, they issued an order to ambulances and emergency vehicles not to move, which made it impossible to get to the sick or

wounded or to reach field hospitals that were set up in six locations of the city before the incursion. Nonetheless, some of the wounded were received in the field hospitals; they were carried there by volunteers. The largest number of casualties occurred in two places: the first was the Old Town, where the field hospital treated more than 185 people. But because emergency vehicles were not allowed to move, many wounded people died, and the condition of many sick people became worse. We could not move anyone from these primitive facilities for five days. As a result, about forty-two people lost their lives.

The second location where the casualty number was high was the refugee camps, New Askar and Old Askar. We tried more than once to reach the field hospital there. On one occasion, with great effort, we passed three or four tanks, but they shot out the tires of our ambulance, ordered the medical crew out, and to frighten us, they shot above our heads and they ordered us to take off all our clothes. We had to do this in an area heavily populated with people, including women and children. This was one of the methods they used to humiliate us. Then, after detaining us for more than three hours, they ordered us to return where we came from. This was the Israeli model for dealing with an emergency medical crisis.

In another important incident, we got news of two wounded men, Khaled Habash and Muhammad Abu Hatab, who were shot in the industrial zone east of Nablus. We tried to reach them, but in the same way we were thwarted. As a result, these young men died. Their corpses were left where they fell for eight days; dogs and birds and ants fed on their bodies and heads. Another man was killed by an Israeli sniper while he was inside his own house, trying to prepare his medicine near his window. Emergency vehicles were not permitted to reach him even though he was only 200 meters from a Red Crescent medical facility. The body remained there for five days, in the house with his wife and children.

Four-year-old Tabarak Jabr, from Dayr al-Hatab, suffered from a neurological disorder. She ran out of medicine and her family asked us to bring her some. But for four days the Israelis prevented us from traveling the four kilometers to her village. We contacted several human rights organizations and foreign consulates to intervene with the Israelis. After eight days, they allowed an ambulance to bring her to the hospital in Nablus, but unfortunately, the child died the next day.

In a similar incident, a child from Salem village who suffered from oxygen deprivation died on the way to the hospital, because the emergency vehicle was held up at a roadblock for three and a half hours, preventing us from reaching her in a timely fashion.

### **Ammar Hindiyya**

When the Israelis moved in the first time (10 February), they occupied our building, the Hindiyya building, in its entirety. It was six storeys of twenty-two commercial offices and fifteen residential apartments. They remained there for seventeen days. The Israeli army and its commanding officer, Saul Mofaz, used it as headquarters. They set up snipers atop the building in preparation for an assault on Balata refugee camp. The army put all the tenants, sixty-three of them, in a single apartment, ours. They remained holed up in our apartment for seventeen days, during which we were able to bring them food only once.

We were imprisoned with them. Whenever they carried out operations or had an exchange of fire, they used some of these people as human shields. For example, when gunfire was directed at them, they would take some people from the apartment

and stand them in the windows. On the seventeenth day at about 6:00 A.M., as they departed, the last soldier— an officer— told my mother, “We will be back to Nablus, and there will be blood.”

Later, on 3 April, there was another assault on Nablus. The army entered the city from the east. At about 9:00 P.M., about twelve tanks rolled to our building. One officer got out and marked the building with a red X. An hour later, the tanks moved a little forward; the last three tanks turned their machine guns at the building and started to shoot, the building being full of people. There was heavy shooting. They managed to destroy most of the glass amid the screams of children, women, and old people. That was a cold night.

Next morning, they came back, opened the main entrance to the building, and aimed their tank fire at the main stairway of the building (used by all) and brought it down. Everybody (about fifty people) in the building was petrified.

On the third day (5 April), a number of tanks, supported by helicopters, surrounded the building, and screamed a warning that we had until 10:00 to vacate, otherwise they would destroy the building with its inhabitants. People, realizing the seriousness of the matter, started to flee. My mother refused to leave. But the soldiers forced her out. When everybody had run out under gunfire without salvaging any of their belongings, tanks directed tens of shells at the building until it caught fire— bear in mind that it housed lumber and furniture businesses in addition to other businesses. The building burned for four or five hours; its smoke reached the clouds. The Israelis seemed to enjoy the bonfire and took pictures. Mofaz supervised the operation. Finally, they brought some water and doused the flames on the perimeter of the building (the area of each floor was 760 square meters). They brought a large amount of explosives (about twenty-five boxes) and placed them in strategic spots under the building; they blared out warnings to the residents of neighboring houses and buildings to vacate. They moved back 700 to 800 meters and then brought it down with a huge explosion. Two adjacent buildings were damaged. Their owners tried to repair them, but it looks like they'll have to rebuild anew. Now we set up tents in front of the wreckage for shelter. We have no place to go and no livelihood.

I have no idea why they destroyed my building. It was four to five kilometers from the Old City— quite distant from the action. No one in the building was wanted or pursued. When residents exited, they were all searched and their IDs checked. A remote possibility may have to do with the publicity generated by their first occupation of the building, when they used people as human shields and otherwise abused them. Most probably, it is revenge.

### **Naseer Arafat**

On 7 April, after five days of the latest curfew, citizens were permitted to leave their homes for three hours. I went out to inspect the neighborhood and was surprised to find that the Shuabi residence did not exist anymore and was merely a heap of rubble. I heard a child shout, “This is a hand!” We rushed over and discovered a man's hand protruding from the rubble. It belonged to Samir al-Shuabi, who lived in the house. We extracted the body from the wreckage. But since the curfew was lifted for only three hours, the consensus was to rebury him in the same spot.

We tried to contact the relatives of Shuabi and found only the brother of the dead man, who didn't seem to know much about who was where, because he lived some distance from his brother. We asked the neighbors, who informed us that they heard them scream for help to open the door early on but couldn't answer the call.

The neighbors and people present started to dig through the rubble. Rescue squads were contacted. Meanwhile, we determined from arriving relatives and neighbors that ten people lived in the house and that all were missing. We also made a sketch of the house. We learned that the demolition of the house was a surprise; it was not announced and was carried out by a huge armored bulldozer. All of the neighbors were able to flee except the Shuabis. Three neighboring houses were also partially or totally demolished.

The rescue teams directed the digging operation. A few hours later and two meters into the rubble, we reached the ceiling of one of the rooms where, to our surprise, we found Abu Talal and his wife Shamsa in a hysterical state, but alive. They managed to survive in a small space without food, water, or fresh air for five days. They did not know about other members of the family.

By now it was nightfall, and the curfew was reimposed and the hundred or so people present and helping with the rescue were ordered by the Israeli army to leave. But the rescue squad was allowed to continue the search, and I was permitted to remain.

Hoping to find more survivors, we cautiously proceeded to dig until we reached two rooms that were mostly filled with rubble. Nobody was found. We continued to dig in spots that were completely filled with rubble, and after, by now, ten to twelve hours of digging, we found the first body, which belonged to the wife of Samir— she was nine months pregnant. In her embrace we found her two children and to her side her father-in-law, her third son, and two sisters-in-law. All seven of them were gathered under an archway in front of the door that they were hoping to exit in their flight from the Israeli bulldozer. But they couldn't open the door and were buried alive. It was clear from Abir's (Samir's sister) corpse that she did not die right away and had tried to use her mobile phone to call for help.

After the Israelis exited, we saw that the old town was a disaster area. There was no commercial place that wasn't damaged or burned or looted by the Israelis. The cobblestone streets and sidewalks were severely damaged by tank tracks or bulldozers. Drinking water and sewage were mixed on the surface of the streets. There were corpses, especially under the wreckage. People were at a loss. They were all in the streets searching for things they knew and things they didn't know. They didn't know where to find food or medicine or doctors. A truly sad scene was that of women carrying their belongings but not knowing where to go.

People were going through the rubble trying to salvage some of their belongings. There was a horrible stench and a state of confusion. People were looking for bananas, the only fruit available, and for bread, flour, and eggs— things that don't require refrigeration. The electric network was severely damaged.

Everyone was stunned by the scale of destruction. In the Old City, more than sixty houses were demolished or burned or severely damaged and thus uninhabitable. There is great invisible damage that will be felt later— wall and ceiling cracks that will make themselves felt next winter. The economic destruction is very large. Now, nobody would invest in the town. Many merchants are looking for a place outside the old town.

In the midst of all this destruction, there are positive actions that merit mention, clearing the streets of dirt and debris being one of them. This started even before the curfew was lifted, indicating the insistence of the people of the city to survive irrespective of the hardships meted out.