

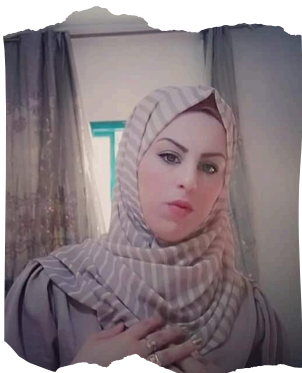
VOICES FROM GAZA



PALESTINIAN WORKING WOMAN
SOCIETY FOR DEVELOPMENT-PWWSO



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MADIHAH DARBIYEH

DISPLACED FROM BEIT LAHIA TO DEIR AL-BALAH.

CURRENTLY LIVING IN A TENT WITHOUT THE MOST BASIC NECESSITIES OF LIFE.

The morning had not yet departed; it was peering through our windows, spreading the warmth of dreams into our homes. Its light-filled our hearts with enthusiasm and readiness for the new day, armed with determination and faith.

In a single moment, the balance of the morning was disrupted, its light vanished, and the birds fled. Cries for help echoed as gray columns of smoke took over the space of light, and the violent sounds of bombing drowned out the birdsong, annihilating all signs of life.

I whispered to myself, "The apocalypse has come." What to do? I asked myself repeatedly, trying to convince myself that this was a transient event, that things would calm down after a few hours. But hours and days passed, and now months, with the war's machinery of destruction consuming everything green and dry. It snatches our loved ones, fills our days with sorrow, orphanhood, and heartbreak that has melted the arteries of our hearts and destroyed the flowers of dreams for my children and all the children of Gaza.



My suffering began from the first moment of the aggression. The intense and heavy sound of rockets forced us to leave our homes, which was a pain in itself — to leave your house and everything you own, to see the fear in your children's eyes, trembling with terror, with no safety and no moment when the bombing stops.

Thus, I moved to an area I thought would be safer, but the peace and safety did not last long before a massive explosion occurred in a residential block, leaving behind many martyrs, injured, and missing people trapped under the rubble, and a large amount of destruction and ruin. Several relatives were killed, and others remained under the debris, unreachable due to the lack of available resources. The news was shocking and painful, wringing my heart over the loss of loved ones and friends. I cried for long hours, thinking the tears would heal my wounded heart and ease my pain, especially since I couldn't say goodbye to them or have them buried in a cemetery as usual.

Once again, the occupation soldiers ordered us to leave our homes and move south. While leaving Beit Lahia and heading south, those were tough moments, "the horrors of Judgment Day." Twenty-four continuous hours, day and night, of intense bombing with fires blazing everywhere, rockets falling everywhere on people, houses, shops, and government buildings, turning the city's sky into a gray space and sorrow seeping into every heart. Blood flowed in the streets. Victims were everywhere, under houses, in the streets, and no one could help or transport them to the hospital due to the heavy shelling and sniping of anyone trying to rescue the wounded and injured.

We arrived at the military checkpoint at ten in the morning to find long lines of displaced people. We had to wait a long time for identity cards to be checked. Standing before the tanks and Israeli occupation soldiers was pure fear. My children were scared, and so was I. Some people were arrested, which made me anxious and tense.

By five o'clock, I managed to cross the military checkpoint. My heart soared, and my children laughed with joy at our survival and crossing the checkpoint. Yet, the shadow of suffering did not leave us and stayed in the details of our displacement. We couldn't find drinking water or water for washing clothes. My children had to walk long distances searching for water and carrying it, which was exhausting for them, as they had to carry water containers.

I am now living in a tent with my children, lacking all the basic necessities of life. There is no food, as we are not registered in the shelter center. I don't have enough money to buy suitable food for the children. The crossings are closed, and goods do not reach Gaza. There are no blankets or mattresses for my children. Also, there is no gas for cooking, so my children have to search for firewood, which puts them at risk.

Only God protects my family and me. Praise be to God in every situation. We remain steadfast, patient, and hopeful.

DR. SUHA SHAATH

PHARMACIST-CITY OF KHAN YOUNIS

I never knew that one day I would long for my daily routine, the one I always used to complain about...I never realized how much of a blessing the simple details of our ordinary lives were until they turned into a dream we yearn to return to in the blink of an eye.

The Palestinian woman, especially from Gaza, is bound by the perpetuity of conflict and the necessity of paying its price. We are all, without exception, compelled to bear the cost of this conflict.

The biggest challenge I faced as a mother and as a woman working in the healthcare field was the impossibility of abandoning my work entirely or staying at home like those in other professions.

I remember at the beginning of the war, I used to work at the Turkish hospital near Netzarim, and the hospital's car would take me from Khan Younis to there and back.

Once, as I was preparing to leave, there was a very strong strike near my home in the Eastern Satar area.

My children were completely against the idea of me going to work. When I insisted on leaving, two of them accompanied me in the car. They told me, "**We live together or die together.**"

The hardest moment I faced after my father's death was leaving the house after receiving a call from the occupation forces informing us that our area was a combat zone. I stood helpless in the middle of the house, not knowing what to take with me and what to leave behind.

How can I condense my big house, the house of my dreams, which took fifteen years to build and cost all the savings of my husband and me, into a suitcase?

I dreamed that this house would one day embrace us and our grandchildren. I imagined them sitting and playing in its wide garden while I coddled the youngest, listening to their simple problems.

I condensed the toil of my life and my dream house into just three bags, hoping to return after a month or two at most.

The displacement lasted longer, and I moved with it, from the Turkish hospital to Nasser hospital, then to Rafah.

It seems that displacement is a curse chasing us in our homes and workplaces.

Every day I left for work, entrusting my children and family to God's care, fearing any treacherous moment from this merciless occupation.

Many times my children urged me not to go to work out of fear for my safety, especially my nine-year-old daughter, Tulay. There was always a silent plea in her eyes, urging me to stay by her side. But I was always fully convinced that cowardice does not protect a person from their fate and that it was a religious duty, before being a national one, to go to work under these harsh conditions as long as I was able to.

I remember a conversation between me and the hospital director, Dr. Sobhi Skeik, where I said: "Anyone who can work and come to the hospital to serve patients but chooses not to is like someone who turns away on the day of battle."

Lastly, this was part of our suffering as women from Gaza and especially as women working in the healthcare field, going to work under these very difficult circumstances, leaving our hearts attached to our loved ones and constantly praying that God keeps them safe and spares us the bitterness of loss.



RA'IDA SALEH

ACTIVIST - DISPLACED FROM BEIT HANOUN, TAL AL-ZAATAR, JABALIA, SHEIKH RADWAN, CENTRAL GAZA, KHAN YOUNIS, AND FINALLY DEIR AL-BALAH.

I couldn't have imagined that my life would end up in a tent after losing my home in northern Gaza. Here I am, walking the same path as my forefathers, displaced from my home just like they were, unsure of when we'll be able to return.



THE BEGINNING

It was 6 AM. I was getting ready for my day and preparing my children for school. A very normal morning, just like any other morning before. But... in moments, everything turned upside down. Moments that shattered the calm, where what seemed like an ordinary day suddenly became chaotic, with the loud and nearby sounds of rockets. Quickly, my family and I fled to the area of Tal Al-Zaatar, only to find out later that all those areas needed to be evacuated.

I realized then that things would take a different turn, and hours of danger were upon us. Once again, I was displaced, this time to my sister's place in the Sheikh Radwan camp. The bombardment intensified, and shrapnel rained down on us, injuring some family members. There was no safe place in Gaza and its camps. Displacement became the only and last option.

THE JOURNEY OF DISPLACEMENT AND SUFFERING

I couldn't believe what I was seeing, the scene of the Palestinian catastrophe repeating itself. Long lines of displaced people, children, youth, elders, and women carrying their young ones, exhausted from the journey and the scorching heat.

I lived through the scene of the catastrophe that my ancestors endured, with all its details. I carried my papers, my home Keys and a bag filled with memories. I clutched a sprig of jasmine and walked towards my tent, reminiscent of our disappointment in this difficult time. From Beit Hanoun to Tal Al-Zaatar, to the Sheikh Radwan camp, and then to the central governorate, where we settled in a building in the industrial area, in poor conditions unworthy of human dignity.

We stayed there for two months. Then, in the middle of the night, we were surprised by tanks surrounding us, urging us to leave the tents for the building. The bombing was relentless, targeting many of the displaced, with screams, mothers' wails, calls for help, and ambulances being shelled. Anyone moving was a target. We were trapped. I couldn't believe what was happening around me. I wished to wake up to morning. I trembled at night from the intensity of the bombing. My biggest fear was that we would be targeted.

Morning came, with all its radiance despite the destruction. It was our chance to escape to the shelter center at the Kastil School.

IN THE TENT

The tent was made of pieces of cloth, plastic, and wooden poles. That's how we built it, resembling a greenhouse. We suffered from cold in winter, with water seeping into the covers and bedding. In summer, we endured intense heat, with insects like flies and mosquitoes spreading diseases.

My memory still holds many painful and harsh scenes that I suffer from every time I try to sleep. My brother's arrest while passing through the safe passage by the occupation soldiers, whose fate I still don't know until this moment. Another harsh scene was walking among the bodies of victims scattered on the ground and on the sidewalk, some decomposed and others charred due to the intensity of the bombing. My heart shrank when I saw cats or dogs gnawing at the bodies of the victims.

I lost many loved ones, causing me great sadness and pain. I didn't bid them farewell in a manner befitting farewell to loved ones. I didn't see them, and they weren't buried in a way befitting the dead. They were all buried under the rubble due to the collapse of their homes from the large number of bombs falling on them.

I didn't expect that the places I thought were safe would witness fierce fighting. Life is hard, and the war is ongoing, and I move from one suffering to another, with all the painful details of these sufferings.

THE MOST PAINFUL

Leaving my home and not being able to return to it. The occupation divided Gaza City into several zones and targets anyone attempting to return home. I lost my home, the home I built with hard work and struggle, gone in an instant due to the indiscriminate bombing of Beit Hanoun. My home, where my soul resided, where my heart sang every time I returned to it, where I found safety. And now, I don't feel safe. I lost my home, which meant my existence, safety, life. My home, where we came together in moments of love, joy, and even moments of pain and sorrow.

FINALLY

I sought refuge at a shelter center run by UNRWA, believing it to be safe and neutral. And our almighty God is the only protector, and the only guardian.

I am now out in the open, in a tent, a concept my mind couldn't accept. My suffering continues. I still move from place to camp to tent in search of safety, forced by repeated tank invasions that compel us to leave our locations.

Confusion fills my mind. When will the war stop? When will I return home? Knowing that I lost my home completely, with all its personal belongings... Where do I go? I thought it would be hours or days, but it took months, and I'm still far from my home.

I left my roses on the windows of my home. Now, I've planted the roses in pots and hung them on the door of my tent. Every time I water them, my heart recites a prayer for salvation.

I'm still waiting for relief. I pray to God to fulfill my wish and let me return to my home in the northern Gaza Strip.

NOURHAN SALEH

ACTIVIST – DISPLACED FROM NORTHERN GAZA TO DEIR AL-BALAH.

Before the seventh of October, just days before, I celebrated my first wedding anniversary. My joy was twofold as my son, not yet two months old, also joined in the celebration of this happy occasion. My family, friends, and loved ones celebrated with me on this joyful occasion, wishing my eldest son a happy life. However, this joyous state didn't last long, as the fires of war erupted, consuming our happiness and destroying moments of peace and tranquillity. Our circumstances became dire, transforming my life from one of dignity to a life of displacement and searching for a safe haven. I can no longer bear it. The cruelty of war makes me feel helpless and weak, unable to continue living because the joy in my heart has been extinguished, and the sense of security is lost.

What sorrow awaits me and my child, whom I gave birth to just months before the war? What kind of beginning is it for my child, who opened his eyes to ruin and destruction, hearing nothing but the sounds of bombardment and violent explosions, which fill him with panic and fear?

In the war, we lost the family home, the place where we spent our childhood and the best years of our lives, bombed and reduced to rubble as part of the scorched earth policy in northern Gaza. And just days later, our own home, my husband's and mine, was also bombed. We had not been married for long, just a year. Moments of joy and happiness vanished.

My home, where I adorned the walls with beautiful pictures and paintings, where I gave birth to my first child. The furniture I cared for and acquired to make our home a haven of comfort and safety. My baby's belongings, carefully prepared for him, and my dreams for his future, all within the warmth of family life. Losing my home means losing the right to live in safety and dignity.

My husband lost his car, which provided us with a livelihood. Though it may seem like a small sum of money, it was enough to meet our needs and provide for a decent life. The car that transported us from place to place and facilitated our lives.

This caused us great pain, and what exacerbated our suffering is that we left our city under the threat of bombing and fire, losing our sense of security. Our lives became endangered, susceptible to bombing at any moment.

War is a declaration of war on your humanity, on all your rights guaranteed by international treaties and norms. It means destruction and dispersal, and that's what happened to me and my family. I suffered loss, grief, and heartache due to the loss of many loved ones and friends directly targeted in Gaza and its north.

During the war, I suffered from malnutrition due to the blockade and the closure of crossings, affecting the breastfeeding of my infant. I did not receive enough food to be able to breastfeed my child, who primarily depended on my milk due to the unavailability of formula.

My child did not receive proper healthcare or the supplements and vitamins suitable for his age to compensate for the lack of formula and appropriate nutrition. And when my child surpassed four months, I couldn't provide him with the proper milk and food suitable for his age due to the depletion of markets from infant foods.

My child is now a full year old and urgently needs milk and healthy, varied food, such as fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, eggs, and dairy, to ensure healthy growth, physically and mentally, providing him with a safe space to play to develop his abilities and skills at this age is essential.

Due to the overcrowding of displaced people and poor sanitation, I need to protect my child from the sounds of violent bombing that shake his fragile heart. My child now suffers from intense screaming whenever he hears an explosion. At night, he wakes up unusually and cries, and each time I fail to calm him down.

I need to live in safety to ensure my physical and mental well-being. This war has greatly affected my mental state. I suffer from fear, anxiety, and severe tension whenever I hear the sounds of ambulances because it means there are casualties and others trapped under the rubble. And I know there are children and mothers under the debris.

Who protects me from the state of fear and panic whenever I hear intense bombing? Who reassures my heart whenever my husband is delayed or loses contact with him?



Who brings me back to the sweet beginnings and beautiful life, to my first steps? Where my joy in my marriage and joy in the arrival of my son once resided. This war shattered my heart and happiness. Moments of joy and happiness have vanished. Regret gnaws at my heart, and disappointment cripples me.

I need a long time to forget. I need a soft pillow to protect my memory from the shocking and violent scenes. I need distant beaches to wash away my fear, anxiety, and deep sadness that struck the depths of my heart.

I dream of a dignified life for me and my family, especially for my child, ensuring the rights guaranteed by international law.

NAREMAN ZIYAD HELLES

**A LAWYER, RESIDENT OF GAZA CITY, SHUJA'YA NEIGHBORHOOD,
DISPLACED TO RAFAH CITY UNTIL NOW!**



"Maybe we narrate our story, or we are the story, but we are for sure witnesses to the whole tale up to this moment. My fingers can no longer write, my memory betrays me at times, from inside the cursed cold tent in winter, and the deadly scorching one in summer, inhumane. But reading is not like watching, and watching is not like living the reality!! So I write my displacement story and the displacement of more than two million people in Gaza, hoping to reach the humanity in every reader.

On the seventh of October 2023, I couldn't imagine for a moment that this day would mark the beginning of an endless saga, unknown days, wasted lifetime, destruction of my future, collapse of my academic and professional life, especially as I was about to open a law office and start my registration in a master's program, departure and displacement, cold and hunger, thirst and poverty, terror and panic; land, sea, and air bombardment, as the Israeli occupation began its war

on the Gaza Strip, forcing us to leave our beautiful home in Shuja'iya neighborhood and head to shelters, the first stop on the displacement journey: Daraj Girls' School in Gaza City, Daraj neighborhood. Our journey to the school was not safe from bombing, as many civilians' homes and shops were targeted, along with main and secondary roads, we walked, inhaling the dust of bombing and the smoke of deadly bullets.

We reached the school without any life necessities, without clothes, food, water, beds, or even blankets, so we slept on papers and school supplies for 7 days with our children, women, elderly, and sick people.

On October 13, 2023, the Israeli army spokesman announced that the residents of northern Gaza Strip should head to its south, beyond the Gaza Valley. What a disaster! How could that be! With children, women, and elderly people, how could we walk such a distance without any means of transportation due to the huge number of displaced people, as if it were Judgment Day.

We started this journey that I will never forget, as if it were the road to the unknown! Walking on foot with children and elderly people, hoping to find safe (false) places announced by the occupation army, but on our way and in front of our eyes, a group of civilians in a truck, some walking beside us, were bombed, hoping to find a safe place south of the Gaza Valley, their limbs were severed, their blood flooded our path, death passed by us many times and we didn't sleep.

We continued the tragic journey, with the road crowded, my family scattered, small ones separated from the elderly, children from their parents, until we reached the first shelter center south of the Gaza Valley, Nuseirat Girls' School. We could hardly enter the school due to overcrowding, for three days we slept in the school corridors, the schoolyard filled with elderly, disabled, and sick people, many of them passed away, yes, they passed away! A tragic life in every sense of the word. An inhumane life, with no privacy, using the bathroom with wood for cooking and no flour, electricity, or water.

Three days and the bombing continued heavily around us, shrapnel scattered on the school directly due to the picking of civilians' houses near the school, so we were forced to leave the supposedly safe place, and my family and I headed to Qarara School in Khan Yunis, a journey of another kind of displacement and new suffering of inhumane life.

On December 1, the Israeli army did not stop there, but announced the immediate evacuation of Khan Yunis city, including Qarara, marking the fourth displacement, as the Israeli army continues its genocide against the residents of Gaza City, with intensified bombing, rocket attacks, and artillery fire above us, we headed to Rafah city to complete the tragedy amid gunfire and mad artillery shells from all sides, we left on a dangerous and deadly road and reached Rafah without shelter, all shelter centers were full of displaced people, we slept on the street for three days, but we set up a small tent with the bare minimum that doesn't protect from the winter cold or summer heat. Yes, a small tent sheltering 5 families with their women, children, and elderly, we didn't know a place to sleep or a time to rest.

Here life turned into a nightmare, yes, a nightmare, we were not prepared for it before, and we never imagined that we would live it. Our warm house was bombed during this period and became ashes with our memories, childhood, books, stories, and everything beautiful in it became a thing of the past, a trace after an eye that used to have a home, and the return to it became a wish, our neighborhood and the residential block where I lived witnessed the martyrdom of my neighbors, friends, and

their families, and committed terrible massacres against my relatives, entire families were wiped out from the civil registry, we saw grief in all its forms and shapes.

We breathe it and live it every moment and in everything... Our families were besieged in northern Gaza, starving, and bombed directly, their limbs scattered on the streets and sidewalks, the martyrs bodies became food for cats and dogs, and cats and dogs became food for hungry people to survive, events full of blood and remains of our loved ones in addition to inhumane living conditions in displacement tents, the queues for water filling, bakeries, food, phone charging, and batteries, showers queues. Our entire life became queues, the spread of diseases and epidemics among the displaced, the spread of insects in tents, life is zero, privacy is non-existent for women and their families.

Our situation didn't end here, especially since the Israeli occupation army has been threatening for weeks with a wide ground attack on Rafah city, to continue the genocide against us, and we continue the suffering, with no idea of any safe place to go to!!! We no longer know if we are lucky to survive! On the brink of life? Or are we the unluckiest, to witness all this tragedy and live it...

But surely all we know is that we are alive, but we are not well.

AMANI ABU RIYA

DISPLACED FROM GAZA

We believe that death is inevitable, but the pain of separation never fades no matter how long time passes. We don't cry as an objection to God's decree, but we cry out of pain after separation. Longing after death is unbearable.

A memorable date, 7/10, a day my siblings planned to surprise me on my birthday, celebrating and staying overnight. It turned out to be an unforgettable surprise in the history of the world..

We are living through difficult days, each day is being tougher than the one before. The sound of missiles is abundant and more frightening. When you see a red-lit sky, it signals the arrival of a missile, which will target us.

They threatened to hit a tower and a mosque in the neighbourhood, and we were forced to leave the house, not knowing where to go or where to sleep at such a late hour.

We went to my sister's house, who is married, to stay there for a while. Just as we were arriving and after about 10 minutes, the neighbourhood erupted in screams and everyone was leaving their houses. We rushed back, and I called my brother to pick us up from where we were. We couldn't believe it would happen in the morning. We went to Rafah, our lives changed a lot, prices started to rise in the vegetable market, meat disappeared, flour became very expensive, and we started to cook on fire as we ran out of gas. This was very difficult and exhausting.

Few days later, I heard in the news that our house was hit. I cried when I saw pictures of the house and remembered the best days of my life in it..

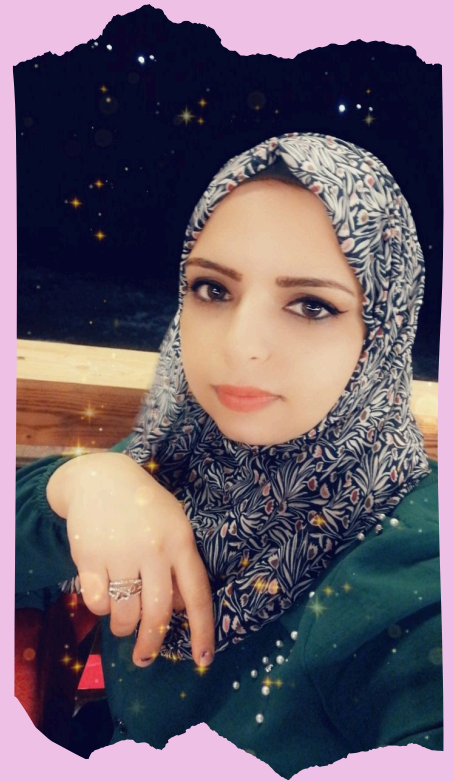
After a while, my sister Maha wanted to take her children to visit her husband's family house. She left around 3 in the afternoon, and at 10, my other sister's phone rang. She answered and heard someone saying "Don't worry, Maha and her children are fine". My sister screamed, got up, and asked what happened. My family was sleeping, I didn't tell anyone until 6 in the morning when my mother went to pray dawn, my brother went to pick Maha up, and thankfully they were okay.

My niece, Sela, was three and a half years old, and she described in detail what happened to her. She became afraid to go to Deir al-Balah because her aunt and uncle died there, leaving her alone. After a while, she stopped sleeping unless she was next to her mother. After a few days, news came of the death of relatives, which saddened and shocked her even more.

After a while, my other sister gave birth, and her daughter had a weekly injection she must have. They were on the street heading to the hospital when bombing started nearby. We heard that the bombing was where her mother and daughter were. My older sister started screaming and running, saying there's water in the street. She went to find my siblings who were with people, crying and trembling. Thankfully, God protected them. On the same day, we received news of the death of my cousin and his children, and his wife was with him, holding their dead infant. This was very painful and sad.

And here we are still in Rafah, praying for a ceasefire and the end of this war on good terms.

{O Allah, calm our weary hearts, so we sleep only in safety and wake only in peace}



E'TEMAD ABU OUDA

DISPLACED FROM AL-SHATI CAMP TO DEIR AL-BALAH CITY



The idea of leaving the house hasn't crossed my mind yet. It's impossible to leave my home. I was against the idea of leaving and evacuating from Al-Shati Camp. I didn't want to repeat the mistake of the elders. This is what I told those around me. I would stay in my house. We would stay and endure. And indeed, I stayed in my house with my children and grandchildren, despite the heavy shelling around us day and night.

The night is terrifying for me and for every member of my family. The shelling intensifies at night, and I experience panic attacks and fear whenever the shelling is severe. My heart, already weakened, beats faster. I hear my young grandchildren crying. I comfort them, calm them down, and pray to God to keep us all safe.

During the day, there are other hardships. We can't leave the house to take care of our needs due to the intense shelling and the fear of what might happen to those who go out to buy supplies or fill water jugs. The shelling continues violently, shaking our hearts and filling my grandchildren with fear. I saw the neighbouring houses being shelled mercilessly, setting some on fire and collapsing others, killing everyone inside: young, old, women, and elderly.

The shelling is relentless everywhere, targeting residential areas and streets. Drones attack anything that moves. For an entire month, I lived through every detail of this catastrophic and inhuman situation, along with the rest of my family. Yet, I was determined to stay in the house. On November 7th, Al-Shati Camp turned into a real battlefield. Despite this, I clung to the idea of staying and not evacuating. But some men asked us to move to safer areas, as Al-Shati Camp had become unsafe and a red zone with intense clashes between the two sides.

I was forced to leave my house, tears streaming down my cheeks and my heart bleeding with pain and regret. My home, where I lived and cherished the most beautiful memories with my family, bore witness to every detail and turning point in my life. The question lingered in my mind, how could I leave it? Where would I go with my children and grandchildren?

We walked south on foot, with no means of transportation available, enduring all kinds of suffering: exhaustion, sadness, regret, and fear consuming my grandchildren's hearts, while fatigue took its toll on me as I have heart disease and can't walk long distances. The massive destruction was beyond belief. Neighbors' houses were blown up, entire neighbourhoods were razed.

As we walked, I thought to myself, "The journey is exhausting, and I miss you, my home." I pondered the source of the pain and suffering and whether others in the world faced the same. Many questions crossed my mind, remaining unanswered. I admitted to myself that we endured a greater suffering than our elders, with thousands of casualties, massive destruction, and many missing people.

Upon reaching Kuwait Junction, the shelling was still ongoing and severe. So we rested near the Yazji bakery before continuing along the path set by the occupation soldiers. Tanks lined the sides of the road. We held our IDs in one hand and white flags in the other. Along the way, it was hard to believe what we saw: bombed cars with bodies still inside, swollen and decomposing corpses. We passed by these bodies without daring to do anything.

We continued walking, leaving Gaza City behind, feeling a sense of safety. A small joy visited our tired and sad hearts. My grandchildren jumped with joy. Yes, we survived. We escaped the danger zone, but my heart and mind were occupied with thoughts of my house consumed by the flames, and the neighbors and friends who remained in the line of fire.

We reached the borders of Al-Bureij Camp, where the residents welcomed us with water and some sweets. I nearly fainted from exhaustion, fatigue, and thirst. I caught my breath, gathered my strength, and searched for a vehicle to take us to my daughter's house. We couldn't find one as diesel was cut off, and the sector was experiencing its worst crisis with closed crossings.

Finally, we found an animal-drawn cart and managed to reach my daughter's house. Despite this, the suffering cast its shadow on our lives, with every detail being painful. There was no drinkable water, no water for washing clothes or bathing, no electricity to accomplish daily tasks. Shops were closed, and supplies didn't reach us.

The situation was catastrophic, and I could hardly believe what we were living through. My life wasn't like this. It used to be dignified and pleasant. Now, life had become unbearable with the absence of basic necessities. The exhaustion I felt in these months was unlike any I had felt before. We cooked on open fires, and gathering firewood was a difficult task in the absence of cooking gas.

I am very tired, and my heart cannot withstand these harsh conditions. Yesterday, I had a heart flutter and went to the hospital, received the necessary treatment, and left. But fatigue continues to plague me, along with the difficult circumstances and my fear for my family members scattered in various places. I fear the war might last longer.

Despite all this pain and suffering, I thank God and pray for this ordeal to end and for peace of mind to return to the people of Gaza.

AMIRA SAIED ABU SALEEM

DISPLACED FROM DER AL-BALAH

Before October 7th, I slept peacefully, not knowing it would be the last night I would feel secure. I woke up at 6 AM on October 7th to terrifying sounds of rockets. I froze in place, my heart racing, as we screamed for my sister who had gone to school as usual. My father rushed to find her and bring her home. We were all on edge. That was when the fear and panic about what was coming and the suffering began.

I am 26 years old, divorced for three years, with a beautiful daughter. My fear for her during that harsh and sudden war was overwhelming, especially since I could only see her twice a month. I managed to contact her once at the beginning of the war. I was desperate to hear her voice and cried because she was far from my embrace.

She was in a province while I was in another, and unfortunately, I couldn't reach her because the situation was too dangerous and she was in a high-risk area.

In the second month of the war, I remember a night that will never be erased from my memory. After praying the "Isha/evening" prayer, my heart was so heavy that I prayed a lot and begged God to let me survive so I could support my daughter and not leave her alone in this bleak life. I don't hate martyrdom; it's the one thing I would wish for if my daughter weren't around. I went to my mother for dinner, exhausted from the pain in my heart and my legs barely supporting me. I had no appetite, but my mother insisted on boiling an egg for me and urged me to eat dinner instead of going to bed hungry. I sat in the living room with my family, my father in front of me. Suddenly, without warning, the house across the street was bombed. All I saw was my father before the lights went out, screams filled the air, and debris rained down on us. It felt like a hurricane had struck the house. I saw my father fall in front of me, and my heart stopped, fearing the worst.

Each of us grabbed a bag and fled to the street. My grandmother was injured, and ambulances rushed to the scene. Imagine, dear readers, all of this happened in less than a minute. We left our home, forced to abandon it, with my heart breaking and tears streaming down my face. I thanked God for answering my prayers.

I couldn't close my eyes that night out of fear and shock. When I finally dozed off at 3 AM, I had a nightmare from sheer terror. I will tell you why this was so harsh and why I was so scared of such a scenario. I am partially visually impaired; I can't see during the day but can see at night. All these events happened at night, and I thanked God for being able to save myself.

The next day, we returned to see our home and found it looted. Even my personal belongings were gone, and the destruction was horrifying. My mother told me that God had saved me from death because there were many shrapnel pieces in the room where I usually slept, including a large piece in the middle of my mattress. I thanked God for saving me from sudden death.

I was constantly plagued by the fear of how I would escape alone if something happened. I always kept my bag close to me, hanging around my neck for quick access if I had to flee. Changing my sleeping place countless times, especially during displacement, caused severe insomnia. I couldn't sleep except on my own bed and only with the sound of the Quran, especially Surah Al-Baqarah, beside me. Everything had changed, even the simplest things.

Water became scarce, very salty, and my skin condition worsened due to water contamination and infrequent bathing. Drinking it harmed my intestines and kidneys due to its saltiness. Why should I lose my beauty? Isn't it enough that my features have become pale and dark circles have formed under my eyes? What did I do to deserve this?

Every night, I cried and asked myself if my daughter was okay. I slept holding her doll, which she loved and named Lana, covering myself with her blanket to feel her close to me. I endured, prayed, and constantly prayed for her, believing that my prayers would protect her. I consoled myself that God was more merciful to her than I could ever be, so I shouldn't worry.



By the sixth month, my mental state was deteriorating. I eagerly awaited Ramadan to pray, as it was my only means of solace. My longing for my daughter grew, and I wished to hold her for just a second. I suffered from severe headaches lasting four days, my health declining due to my mental state. My immunity weakened, and I caught a severe flu in the last week of Ramadan. Another reason for my weakened immunity was the lack of vitamins, which I ran out of at the start of the war and couldn't replenish due to the shortage of medicines. There were no fruits or vegetables, leading to poor nutrition and reliance on canned food, which could cause other diseases like gout. The situation was exacerbated by the skyrocketing prices, which were terrifying.

I decided to go to the Red Crescent for treatment two days before Eid and discovered I had migraines, unsurprising given the stress, anxiety, and constant worry about myself, my family, and my daughter. The war caused unforgettable harm. Isn't the loss of relatives and friends enough? That alone is a devastating blow, and loss is painful.

A day before Eid, I contacted my daughter for the second time due to poor communication and internet service. Hearing her voice brought joy, but the shock came after six months of war when my three-year-old daughter said she didn't want to talk to me and hung up. I cried, my heart aching. I knew she would forget me due to the long separation, but it was still hard to bear. Motherhood is precious.

We entered the seventh month of the war, hoping for a ceasefire, not just for me but for everyone. As we moved into the eighth month, we hoped for positive developments to bring joy to our weary hearts. Even if the war ends, questions remain: Will everything return to normal? Will our memories of the painful videos we saw fade? Will we live healthy lives? Will our hearts heal quickly from their pain? Will the future remain uncertain? Will my 26-year-old youth remain withered?

I have been psychologically and physically destroyed in every sense. I ask God for compensation and healing for our hearts. Perhaps you dislike something, and it is good for you, and perhaps you love something, and it is bad for you. God knows, and you do not.

My love for my city knows no bounds, and I will never leave it.

LAYAN AHMED AZIZ

**UNIVERSITY STUDENT STUDYING MUSIC
DISPLACED FROM GAZA CITY TO RAFAH, NOW IN A SHELTER IN DEIR
AL-BALAH.**

I wished the news was not true, that my friend had not died. We received news that the area around Al-Shifa Hospital had been bombed after it was besieged, resulting in a large number of casualties and countless injuries, not to mention entire residential blocks being destroyed on top of those inside them. Fear gripped our hearts, and we tried to communicate more, but the communication network was unresponsive. The lines were cut off, and we knew there were massacres happening, which was why the communications were cut.

I was worried about my relatives there, and also my friends, my childhood friends, with no news to ease our anguished hearts. I tried listening to the news, but it didn't provide the details my heart longed for, only announcing the numbers of martyrs without mentioning names. Hours passed, heavy as ages, without details or news. The fires of anxiety and fear began to blaze in my heart, my heart filled with pessimism, as was my mother's.

Suddenly, our hearts sank as if they had received the news immediately. "The martyrdom of my relatives and entire families being erased from the civil registry" was the news that reached my family just before sunset. I later learned that among the martyrs was my friend, my childhood friend and soul companion. That was how we called each other. My heart dropped upon hearing this painful news. The world and my heart felt constricted. I couldn't believe it. I wished the news were false, but it was certain, delivering a blow to my heart.

We spent a lot of time together, at school, in the neighborhood, and even in university, where our relationship grew stronger as we studied the same major, music. We met often, confiding in each other, escaping together from the city's boredom and the monotony of the alleys to the sea, where we played music or listened to tunes that delighted our souls. I lost her, and now all I have left are the bitter memories and the pain of remembrance, crushing my heart even more, for she was the love of my soul. She is gone, my friend has gone to the sky and left me with the sorrow that has settled in my heart and clouded my spirit. I also lost my teacher who encouraged me to study music, who stood by me, supported me, guided me to be on the right path. I lost many friends, acquaintances, in this war.

In this war, I haven't just suffered loss; I've endured displacement, moving from place to place seeking safety, which I still haven't found. I've suffered being away from the loved ones and friends left in Gaza City. The occupation has fragmented Gaza, making it impossible to move from one place to another without the risk of bombing and targeting.

I am now living in a shelter, missing many things. I miss ordinary life, my normal life. I miss my friends at university, my city, its streets, the sea we used to flee to from the summer heat, and now we suffer the summer heat in a tent with little water and food.

I miss the simplest things. We prepare food and bake bread over a fire, standing in long lines for water and the bathroom. Nothing is in its natural state. The streets have lost their features due to the bombing, the houses are destroyed, and Gaza City looks as if a powerful earthquake struck it. I miss my bandmates and wish I could hug them all. I miss my musical instruments, to play them and lift this weight off my chest, to play the music of the beginning and the end of the war.

I've lost many achievements and skills I gained from playing. I need my instrument to play on, wishing I could write the end of the war with a musical note that doesn't fall from the musical scale. I hope the war ends, and my normal life returns, to stand on stage with my bandmates and gift the world a song of peace and love.



NE'MA HASSAN

PWWSO ACTIVIST

I am a mother responsible for seven children. I work intermittently as a social worker with civil society organizations. I love my work very much; it is my pleasure in life. I pour all my burdens and worries into it to keep surviving.

I am also a writer. I have written novels, poetry, and letters. I feel what I see, and I write what I feel.

This is why history is emotional in the books of writers.

I started writing a few years ago. I was looking for a lifeline, but I found drowning in poetry more delightful and luxurious. I obtained membership in the Writers' Union, and I was told I was the fastest to gain membership.

I worked a little in theatre and have experience with the documentary film "Tales of Gaza." Perhaps everything I have written and directed so far portrays Gaza as a blurred image, deliberately signalling that it is there.

I have only left Gaza for a short trip about two months before the war, to attend a literary forum on the other side of the country.

Therefore, Gaza completely resembles me. Whenever I stayed with someone, I resembled them, and Gaza is a lifelong companion. I have lived through many wars and witnessed many deaths inside Gaza. In every war, I lose a loved one, I reached a point where I feel that loss has a scheduled appointment in my front yard.

In one of the wars, my house was destroyed while I was inside. I came out in front of the tanks, which sat like a big ogre in the middle of the living room, with a white flag (a white nightgown on a broomstick) to be able to leave the house with those who were with me. I have lived in many houses or what are called houses because most of them were demolished, and there were no houses left to rent in the devastated city. The catastrophe was ongoing, but the world only sees it when the death toll escalates to impact its economy and stock markets.

In the third week of the war, we woke up to explosions in the house that nearly uprooted it from its place (if not for God's mercy). A missile weighing one and a half tons fell on the house next to ours and penetrated six meters deep into the ground.

Everyone in the neighborhood fled to the street, escaping death, which retreated at the last moment and prevented the missile from exploding. I went out with my children, who were shivering from the cold and fear and other things I can't name now.

We were displaced to a school, then to relatives' houses, then to another school, and then to another house, as if displacement was chasing us. We frightened it with the idea of becoming accustomed to it, only for it to ambush us from a side we had sealed against fear, causing us to tremble again at the first knock of darkness.

I got used to wars, but now it is a war with seven heads. Every time you turn your head, it bites a part of you.

Many nights passed when I was afraid to go to the bathroom because I was afraid that the war might ambush me with a missile that takes me without my children or takes them without me. I would curl up among them as a shield guarding their sleep so none of them would wake up in fear. I tried not to move so they would get used to the sound of the missiles and fall asleep with every strike.

I had a fixed routine every day, like any head of a family.

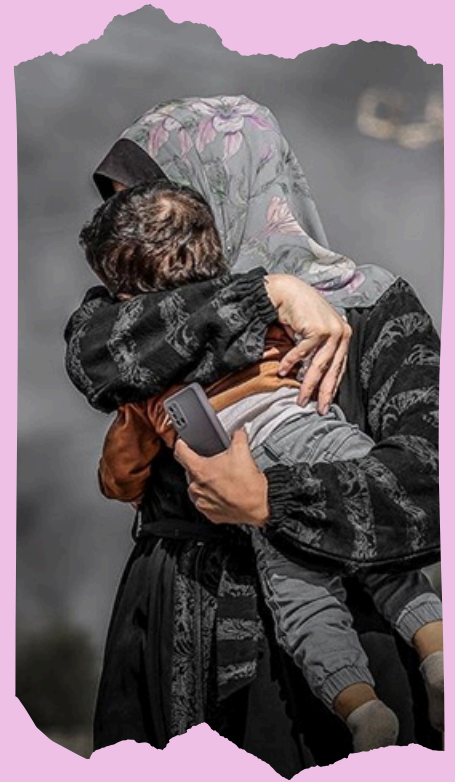
I woke up at dawn to join my children in the lines for water and bread (before wheat became a weapon).

We divided the tasks. One of us collected paper and wood, another waited in the water line, another spent the day in the bread line and was replaced when tired. One of us would return to collect paper and wooden sticks for cooking on the fire if we had something to cook. As for the little ones, their task was the hardest: not to be afraid when the missile fell while we were in our daily tasks.

Sometimes I returned without getting my turn for bread, coming back ashamed to my children and trying to comfort them with a bedtime story if I couldn't find an alternative to a loaf of bread.

When I got a share of the wheat after a suffering to have it, I returned with my head held high, empty inside, smiling like a hero who mastered the role of victory.

The schedule changed after another week, and the tasks increased. I had to roam the city looking for medicine for my children, which run out and was no longer available in pharmacies. I walked back and forth until the devastated city knew me.



Getting flour after it ran out and prices soared, and delivering any aid I received to the people in their tents were added tasks. I did all this while holding my heart against the door handle with all my strength, preventing death from seeing my little ones. The longer the war lasted, the greater your responsibilities grew. You can't hold on to life if you don't distribute what's in your hand and open your fist well to signal to the miserable world that you are here. If wheat leans, the wind is enough to bend it. We are not numbers, but we are good in counting the deaths.

FATIMA HAMOUDA

PWWSA ACTIVIST – DISPLACED FROM BEIT LAHIA TO RAFAH



I write to you my story, and I don't know where to start, for all the letters and words in all the languages of the world are not enough to express the sorrow, pain, helplessness, and fear within us. We had a beautiful life and people we loved. We had dreams and ambitions we were planning for and were building a beautiful future for our children. All of this evaporated and became like a mirage. For more than three months, we have been subjected to intense war in Gaza City.

We never imagined in our worst nightmares that we would endure such destruction and oppression. Death has passed before us many times, but we did not die. Each time, we survive by God's mercy and a miracle from Him.

I am a mother of four beautiful children. Let me tell you a little about them.

My prince Hussein, 8 years old, loves football, and his favorite team is Real Madrid. Andera Gandhi, 6 years old, my pampered and smart girl, always dreamed of traveling, as if she felt something would happen on this earth.

My third child, the naughty Zaid, with his charming and pleasant nature, asks me every night before bed: "Mom, will we die together and stay forever in heaven? Let's go to heaven now where there are no wars and no fear."

My fourth child, Magdi, one and a half years old, has lived through two wars and escalations since he was born. He has grown up to the sounds of bombings and planes.

We never wished for such a life for our children. We had a beautiful extended family, most of whom were killed during the war. Our homes were destroyed, and we no longer have any shelter. We were displaced from North Gaza, specifically the beautiful city of Beit Lahia, known for its delicious strawberries, three months ago, leaving behind all our memories, my children's toys, their school bags, and the photo albums where we documented all our beautiful moments.

All I remember is that we fled under the sounds of shelling; there were cannons behind us, the sea in front of us, and F-16 warplanes above us. Where could we escape to? From the horror and terror, I forgot my youngest child on the third floor, and we rushed down the stairs to hide. Shrapnel was everywhere, and body parts littered the street. I lost most of my family members in the war. My father passed away more than 15 years ago, and I lived with my uncles whom I loved dearly. But now, I lost them too, along with their wives and children. A horrible massacre took them; 25 martyrs, each with a sad story, the hardest being the martyr Mohammad, the doctor who graduated months ago and returned to Palestine to serve and treat the sick. He was martyred, and there was no one to treat his bleeding.

In the north, I lost my neighbors and friends, some of whom were martyred while digging graves for their brothers in the Beit Lahia cemetery, unaware they were digging their own graves, where their bodies would be buried after the planes targeted them. Even the dead and their graves were not spared.

I hope you will help me build a new life for my children away from this war, fear, and pain. I truly wish to save them and take them far away. Yes, we love our homeland, but we have become strangers in our own country.

Enough of the pain, fear, and the lack of all life's essentials: food, water, and medicine.

We don't have the luxury of crying now. We don't have the luxury of mourning. We don't have the luxury of dying in peace, for we have been torn apart.

We headed to Rafah, to "Mirage" area, on 15/10/2023, and stayed with friends for a month, but unfortunately, the area was bombed. We were displaced a second time to Al-Mawasi in Khan Yunis, staying in tents for another month despite the severe cold. When Khan Yunis was invaded and surrounded by tanks, we left, knowing it might be our last breath. The scene was like the Day of Judgment. My husband and I shared carrying our children and walked with them for kilometers in the freezing cold to our fourth displacement, which is now in a camp set up by the Red Cross in the Saudi neighborhood in Rafah. We are now waiting for a close rescue and are optimistic that a truce will be reached soon, or we will all die without being remembered by history, or you will be the witnesses to our story.

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