

20 years on, photographer recalls Israeli killing 11-year-old Palestinian boy

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?Footage taken by Talal Abu Rahma shows Jamal al-Durrah trying to protect his son, Muhammad, on September 30, 2000 in Gaza. (Photo: AFP)

Ramallah, October 2 (RHC)-- Wednesday marked the 20th anniversary of the brutal shooting death of an 11-year-old Palestinian boy Muhammad al-Durrah by Israeli regime soldiers in the Gaza Strip despite desperate efforts by his father -- Jamal, who was injured in the incident -- to shield him from a hail of bullets.

Muhammad was killed on September 30, 2000 following a protest rally by local Palestinians in reaction to the provocative visit to the Noble Sanctuary of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by hawkish Israeli general and politician Ariel Sharon (1928-2014). The child's killers have never been brought to justice by the Israeli regime or any international authority.

The images of the vicious police response to the demonstration caused widespread outrage among Palestinians and led to the Aqsa Intifada. The uprising lasted until February 2005 and left nearly 5,000 Palestinians killed, including almost 1,000 children.

The atrocity by the Israeli regime forces came after Sharon -- who had also led the massacre of hundreds of Palestinians years earlier in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp in Lebanon -- marched into the holy Islamic site with a number of right-wing Israeli officials two days earlier on September 28 while protected by some 2,000 military police officers. The move sparked an angry protest by Palestinian Muslims worshipping inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque at the time.

On the day that Muhammad al-Durrah was killed, a group of angry Palestinians approached the illegal Israeli settlement of Netzarim in the middle of the Gaza Strip -- which was still occupied by the regime forces at the time -- and started throwing stones at the Israeli occupation troops who had set up a military checkpoint at its eastern gate.

As the child and his father sought shelter behind a small concrete structure, Jamal al-Durrah shouted out at the Israeli soldiers to stop shooting at the child. His cries, however, were totally ignored and Muhammad was struck by bullets several times and died on his father's lap.

The images of the brutal shooting flashed around the globe. However, not a single international institution has ever demanded the trial of the murderers. This is while the atrocities of the Israeli regime against the Palestinian population and their killing of civilians, including children, continue unabated and with impunity.

Palestinian cameraman from Gaza, Talal Abu Rahma, who was working for France 2 News Channel at the time, shot a video of the entire incident that was then aired by the broadcaster. It became one of the most powerful images of what became known as the Second Intifada in the occupied Palestine.

According to Al-Jazeera, the Israeli regime tried to challenge the veracity of the footage taken by Abu Rahma, with the Israeli military denying that its soldiers had been responsible.

It took until 2013, it noted, for a French court to vindicate France 2 and Abu Rahma, ultimately upholding their defamation case against Philippe Karsenty, a French media commentator who had accused them of staging the video, and fining him 7,000 euros.

Abu Rahma, who has won numerous awards for his work, is now based in Greece, where he, his wife and son are residents. He works between there and Amman, Jordan. He has been banned from returning to Gaza since 2017.

The following is how he partially remembers events surrounding Muhammad's brutal killing 20 years ago in a Wednesday article published by Al-Jazeera:

"I could not hear anybody over the sound of the bullets. It just kept getting worse. There was a lot of shooting, many injured. I was really scared. There was blood on the ground. People were running, falling down; they didn't know where the bullets were coming from, they were just trying to hide. I was confused about what to do too – whether to continue filming or to run away. But I'm a stubborn journalist.

"Then one of the children who was hiding beside me said: They are shooting at them. I asked: Shooting at who(m)?

"That was when I saw the man and the boy against the wall. They were hiding and the man was moving his hand and saying something. The bullets were coming right at them. But I couldn't tell where they were coming from.

"When the shooting stopped, the boys near me started running, left and right. I stayed by myself and then decided to walk away. I walked for about five to seven minutes towards my car. I was trying to call the office in Jerusalem – it took a while to get a signal back then when mobile phones were still quite new. As I was walking, I saw a colleague from another news agency.

I2 asked him, How many injured, how many killed? He told me about three. I said, Look, if you are talking about the three dead, add another two. I think there are another two, they were killed against the wall. I showed him what I had filmed and he started screaming, Oh no! Oh no! This is Jamal, this is his son, Muhammad, they were in the market. Oh my God, oh my God!"

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