Khan Yunis Massacre 2002: A Helicopter Missile on a Crowd

At dawn on Monday, 7 October 2002, Israeli tanks, with helicopter cover, stormed the city of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. When residents believed the incursion was over and came out of their shelters, a helicopter fired a missile into a crowd of about 200 of them, killing ten, including four children, and wounding more than fifty. The toll of that dawn reached at least 14 killed and more than a hundred wounded. [1] [2]

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said such actions “have no legal or moral justification,” [1] and Al Mezan described it as a massacre in which heavy weaponry was used against civilians, amounting to grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention. [2]

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The Khan Yunis massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Dawn on Monday, 7 October 2002, from about 1 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. [2]

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Place	The al-Amal and al-Katiba neighborhoods and the western areas of Khan Yunis [2] [1]
Perpetrator	About 30 tanks and military vehicles from the Gush Katif settlements, with helicopter cover [2]
Method	A helicopter missile on a crowd of about 200 residents, heavy machine-gun and rocket fire, and shooting at Nasser Hospital [1] [2] [3]
Killed	At least 14, including four children and a woman [1] [2]
Wounded	More than 100; according to Al Mezan about 200 casualties, 130 of whom stayed in hospital [1] [2]

The incursion: the night of 7 October 2002

At about 1 a.m. on Monday, some 30 Israeli tanks and military vehicles set out from the Gush Katif settlements toward the al-Amal area of Khan Yunis, under helicopter cover. [2] According to eyewitnesses, helicopters fired heavy machine guns and rockets at two residential buildings, while the forces shelled several neighborhoods and fired on residents. [2] [3] The circulated account says more than sixty tanks and vehicles took part, storming the western part of the city, the western hills and al-Amal.

Occupation soldiers also opened fire on Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, where the wounded were being treated. [3] The tanks withdrew at about 6:30 a.m., leaving heavy damage to homes and property. [2]

A missile on people leaving their shelters

Believing the incursion was over, about 200 residents came out of their shelters in al-Katiba, and an Israeli helicopter fired a missile into the crowd, killing ten people, including four children, and wounding more than fifty, ten of them critically. [1] Palestine’s letter to the United Nations affirmed that occupation forces “fired a missile upon a large crowd.” [3] According to Al Mezan, eight of the victims were killed by missile shrapnel. [2]

The killed and the wounded

Al Mezan documented the names of twelve killed on the day of the massacre, including four minors and a 50-year-old woman killed after soldiers broke into her home: [2]

Name	Age
Abdul Fattah Ali al-Salut	40
Rahima Hasan Salameh (Abu Shamaleh)	50
Ihab Hilmi Khalaf	22
Jamal Fathi Barbakh	17
Usama Muhammad Abdeen	30
Muhammad Mustafa Sadiq	20
Faris Abdul Nasir al-Zaqzuq	18
Ayman Muhammad Saqr	27
Ahmad Abdul Rauf al-Astal	14
Muhammad Hussain al-Astal	14
Haitham Musa Abu Naja	25
Abdullah Walid Sabah	16

The toll rose to at least 14 killed according to the UN Secretary-General's statement. [1] Medical sources said about 200 were injured, 130 of whom stayed in hospital. [2]

Reactions

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat called it "war crimes and murder." [1] The UN Secretary-General said he "deplores the military attack in civilian areas," citing "reckless disregard" for humanitarian law, and said such actions "have no legal or moral justification." The Danish EU Presidency condemned the killings, and Russia called the use of tanks and aircraft "clearly disproportional." [1]

The next day occupation Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said the operation “was a success,” while admitting that “there were some civilians” among the dead; US Secretary of State Colin Powell said Washington was “concerned about the level of civilian casualties,” France deplored “disproportionate measures in very densely populated areas,” and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Sergio Vieira de Mello wrote that the killings appeared to violate the Geneva Conventions. [1]

Read about the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

On a single October dawn in 2002, occupation tanks stormed Khan Yunis, then a helicopter fired a missile at residents who had left their shelters believing the danger had passed, killing ten of them at once, including four children; the toll rose to at least 14 killed and more than a hundred wounded. The Khan Yunis massacre remains a testament to the bombing of civilian crowds, which the UN Secretary-General said had no “legal or moral justification.”

Frequently asked questions about the 2002 Khan Yunis massacre

When did the Khan Yunis massacre take place?

It took place at dawn on Monday, 7 October 2002, from about 1 a.m. to 6:30 a.m.

How many people were killed in the 2002 Khan Yunis massacre?

At least 14 Palestinians were killed, including four children and a woman, and more than a hundred were wounded.

What happened in al-Katiba?

About 200 residents came out of their shelters believing the incursion was over,

and an Israeli helicopter fired a missile at them, killing ten, including four children.

Was a hospital targeted in Khan Yunis?

Yes; occupation soldiers opened fire on Nasser Hospital, where the wounded were being treated, according to Palestine’s letter to the UN.

What was the international reaction to the Khan Yunis massacre?

The UN Secretary-General said it had no “legal or moral justification,” the EU, France and Russia condemned it, and Washington expressed concern over civilian casualties.

Sources and references

1. “Chronological Review of Events Relating to the Question of Palestine: October 2002,” Division for Palestinian Rights, United Nations.
2. “The Israeli Forces Perpetrate a Massacre in Khan Yunis, Using Heavy Weaponry Against Civilians,” Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, Ref. 81/2002, 7 October 2002.
3. Identical letters from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, 7 October 2002.