Bureij Camp Massacre 2002: A Massacre on the Second Day of Eid

At dawn on Friday, 6 December 2002, the second day of Eid al-Fitr, more than 40 Israeli tanks and military vehicles, under Apache helicopter cover, surrounded the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip from every direction, cut its electricity, and pounded its residential quarters with shells, missiles and heavy machine guns for three hours. Ten Palestinians were killed, including two UNRWA staff members, a woman and four members of one family, and dozens were wounded. [1] [2] [3]

President Yasser Arafat called it “a new massacre,” [4] and the UNRWA Commissioner-General condemned “the indiscriminate use of heavy firepower in a densely populated civilian area.” [3] It was not the camp’s first massacre: half a century earlier it had witnessed the Bureij camp massacre of 1953 .

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The Bureij camp massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Dawn on Friday, 6 December 2002, the second day of Eid al-Fitr, at about 2:30 a.m. [1] [2]

Item	Details
Place	Bureij refugee camp, central Gaza Strip [2] [5]
Perpetrator	More than 40 tanks and military vehicles, with Apache helicopter cover [1] [2]
Duration	About three hours [1] [4]
Killed	10, including two UNRWA staff, a woman and four members of one family [1] [3]
Wounded	At least 20, including children [1]
Demolition	Four homes destroyed and dozens of others damaged [1]

The massacre: an Eid dawn

At about 2:30 a.m. on the second day of Eid, occupation forces stormed Bureij camp with more than 40 tanks backed by Apache helicopters, cut the camp's electricity, began house-to-house searches, and fired on residential areas. [1] [2] Residents, including women, children and the elderly, were forced out of their homes into the cold at midnight, while shells, missiles and heavy machine-gun fire chased them under searchlights that lit up the camp. [1]

The occupation forces said their aim was to arrest a Popular Resistance Committees leader in the central camps, but they did not capture him; they shelled and destroyed his house along with two others. [2] [1] Shells and missiles destroyed four homes and damaged dozens of others. [1]

Ten Palestinians were killed, including four members of one family and a woman, and dozens were wounded, including children. [1] Tens of thousands attended the funeral of the ten that same day. [2] [4]

The two UNRWA staff members

Among the dead were two staff members of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA): [5] [3]

Name	Age	Job	How they were killed
Osama Hassan Tahrawi	31	School attendant at UNRWA's Bureij Boys' Preparatory School	A helicopter-fired rocket as he stood in his yard; he was killed with six friends and relatives [5] [3]
Ahlam Riziq Kandil	32	Teacher at UNRWA's Bureij Elementary Co-educational School	Hit inside her home, she died after being taken to hospital [5] [3]

UNRWA affirmed that Osama Tahrawi was unarmed and had no links to any armed group or to the targeted families. [3] The massacre came just two weeks after an Israeli soldier killed UNRWA staff member Iain Hook in Jenin camp, bringing the number of agency staff killed that year to five. [5]

Reactions

UNRWA Commissioner-General Peter Hansen said: "This loss of civilian lives, of people working for a humanitarian United Nations agency, is completely unacceptable," condemned "the indiscriminate use of heavy firepower in a densely populated civilian area," and announced a detailed inquiry. [5] [3]

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he was "gravely disturbed," that "most of those killed were civilians," and reminded Israel of its obligations as an occupying power. [4] President Yasser Arafat called it "a new massacre," the Palestinian Authority said the occupation government was "continuing its policy of death and destruction," and the Palestinian leadership called on the Secretary-General and the Security Council to protect the refugees. [4] [1]

Read about the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

At dawn on Eid, dozens of tanks stormed Bureij camp, drove its people out into the cold, and shelled their homes with missiles and shells, killing ten Palestinians, among them a school attendant and a teacher working for a UN humanitarian

agency. The Bureij massacre remains a testament to a holiday turned into mourning, and to the fact that even UN staff were not spared the occupation’s fire.

Frequently asked questions about the 2002 Bureij camp massacre

When did the 2002 Bureij camp massacre take place?

It took place at dawn on Friday, 6 December 2002, the second day of Eid al-Fitr.

How many people were killed in the Bureij camp massacre?

Ten Palestinians were killed, including two UNRWA staff, a woman and four members of one family, and at least 20 were wounded.

Who were the UNRWA staff killed in Bureij?

Osama Hassan Tahrawi (31), a school attendant, and Ahlam Riziq Kandil (32), a teacher, both working in UNRWA schools in the camp.

What was used in the Bureij camp raid?

More than 40 tanks and military vehicles, backed by Apache helicopters, with missiles, shells and heavy machine-gun fire.

What was the international reaction to the Bureij massacre?

The UN Secretary-General said he was “gravely disturbed,” and the UNRWA Commissioner-General condemned the indiscriminate use of heavy firepower.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “10 Martyrs and 20 Wounded in Bureij Camp, an Israeli Massacre on the Second Day of Eid,” Al-Bayan, 7 December 2002.

2. “Friday, December 6, 2002,” The Palestine Chronology, Institute for Palestine Studies.
3. “2 UN Workers among 10 Killed in Israeli Raid on Gaza Camp,” UN News, 6 December 2002.
4. “Chronological Review of Events Relating to the Question of Palestine: December 2002,” Division for Palestinian Rights, United Nations.
5. “Two United Nations Palestine Relief Agency Employees Killed,” UNRWA press release, 6 December 2002.