Sabra Massacre 2004: The Assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin

At dawn on Monday, 22 March 2004, Israeli helicopter gunships fired three missiles at Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, founder of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), as he sat in his wheelchair in the Sabra neighborhood of central Gaza City, near his home. The paralyzed sheikh was killed along with seven other Palestinians, and 17 others were wounded, including four children and his two sons. [1] [2]

Occupation Prime Minister Ariel Sharon personally gave the green light for the assassination, [3] as Israel crossed every red line by assassinating a paralyzed 67-year-old political leader. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights described the crime as “an act of state terrorism,” [1] and when the Security Council tried to condemn it, the United States struck down the draft resolution with its veto. [4]

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The Sabra massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Dawn on Monday, 22 March 2004, at about 5:20 a.m. [1]
Place	The Sabra neighborhood in central Gaza City, near Sheikh Yassin’s home [1]
Perpetrator	Israeli helicopter gunships, on the orders of occupation Prime Minister Ariel Sharon [3] [2]
Weapon	Three missiles: one hit Sheikh Yassin and his companions directly, and two exploded nearby [1]
Killed	8: Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and seven others [1] [2]
Wounded	17, including four children and Sheikh Yassin’s two sons [1]
International response	A US veto in the Security Council, and condemnation by the Commission on Human Rights [4] [5]

Who was Sheikh Ahmed Yassin?

Ahmed Yassin was born in the village of al-Jura in the Asqalan (al-Majdal) district in June 1936, and lived through the Nakba at the age of twelve, when he and his family were driven out to the Gaza Strip. At sixteen he was injured in an accident while playing with friends, breaking the vertebrae of his neck and leaving him paralyzed for the rest of his life. [2]

He headed the Islamic Center in Gaza, and in 1987 agreed with a group of leaders to found the Hamas movement. The occupation authorities arrested him in 1982 and sentenced him to 13 years in prison; he was released in 1985 in a prisoner exchange. He was arrested again in 1989, and in 1991 sentenced to life imprisonment plus fifteen years, until he was released in 1997 under an agreement between Jordan and Israel. [2]

The massacre: three missiles at a paralyzed man

At about 5:20 a.m. on 22 March 2004, Sheikh Yassin was leaving the Islamic Center mosque in the Sabra neighborhood, heading back to his nearby home in his wheelchair, accompanied by several companions and his sons. [1] [2] The Israeli helicopters fired three missiles: the first hit Sheikh Yassin and his companions directly, and the other two exploded in the surrounding area, killing others. [1]

According to the circulated Palestinian account, the helicopters were US-made Apaches; the missiles tore the sheikh's body apart near his home, and the remains of his wheelchair were scattered on both sides of the road between the house and the mosque.

The killed and the wounded

Name	Age
Sheikh Ahmed Yassin	67 (66 according to PCHR) [1] [2]
Mo'men Ibrahim al-Yazouri	28 [1]
Rateb Abdul Rahman al-Aloul	35 [1]
Khamis Mushtaha	32 [1]
Ameer Ahmed Abdul Aal	25 [1]
Rabi' Abdul Hai Abdul Aal (bodyguard)	18 [1]
Ayoub Ahmed Atallah (bodyguard)	26 [1]
Khalil Abdul Elah Abu Jayab (bodyguard)	30 [1]

Seventeen Palestinians were wounded, including four children and Sheikh Yassin's two sons, Abdul Hamid (33) and Abdul Ghani (29); Abdul Hamid and five others were seriously injured. [1]

Source	Killed	Wounded
Palestinian Centre for Human Rights	8 including Sheikh Yassin, named	17 [1]

Source	Killed	Wounded
Al Jazeera Mubasher	Sheikh Yassin and 7 of his companions	His two sons among the wounded [2]
Al Jazeera Net (2004)	Sheikh Yassin and nine others	More than 10 [3]
Circulated text	7	15

An order from the head of the occupation government

The assassination was not the decision of an officer in the field: according to reports on the day, Ariel Sharon personally gave the green light to eliminate Sheikh Yassin, and oversaw the operation from his ranch in the Negev. [3] The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights links the crime to the policy of extrajudicial assassination officially adopted by the occupation government, describing it as an “illegal and excessive use of force” in violation of international law and humanitarian law. [1]

Reactions

Thousands of Palestinians marched in angry protests in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Authority declared three days of mourning, and President Yasser Arafat said the assassination “crossed all red lines.” [3] Chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said the cycle of violence would not end through assassinations, but by ending the occupation, and Arab Knesset member Ahmad Tibi called the assassination “an immoral terrorist act.” [3]

The United Nations and the US veto

On 24 March 2004 the UN Commission on Human Rights held a special sitting after the assassination of Sheikh Yassin, and adopted a resolution condemning the practice of “extrajudicial executions” of Palestinians, by 31 votes to 2 (the United States and Australia), with 18 abstentions. [5]

On 25 March 2004 the Security Council voted on a draft resolution submitted by Algeria and Libya condemning the killing of Sheikh Yassin; 11 members voted in favor and three abstained, but the United States struck it down with its veto. In the session, France described the killing as “an extrajudicial execution.” [4]

Read about the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

At dawn on 22 March 2004, occupation helicopters fired three missiles at a paralyzed 67-year-old man in his wheelchair, in a populated residential neighborhood, killing him and seven others and wounding 17, including children. The decision came from the head of the occupation government, and the cover came from Washington, which struck down its condemnation in the Security Council. The Sabra massacre remains a testament to a policy of extrajudicial execution that made no distinction between a leader, a companion and a passing child.

Frequently asked questions about the Sabra massacre

When did the Sabra massacre take place?

It took place at dawn on Monday, 22 March 2004, at about 5:20 a.m., in the Sabra neighborhood of central Gaza City.

How many people were killed in the Sabra massacre?

Eight Palestinians were killed, including Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and 17 others were wounded, including four children and Sheikh Yassin’s two sons.

Who ordered the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin?

Occupation Prime Minister Ariel Sharon personally gave the green light for the

assassination and oversaw its execution.

How old was Sheikh Ahmed Yassin when he was assassinated?

He was 67; he was born in June 1936 in the village of al-Jura in the Asqalan district.

What happened at the Security Council after Sheikh Yassin’s assassination?

Eleven members voted for a draft resolution condemning the assassination on 25 March 2004, but the United States struck it down with its veto.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “Israeli Occupying Forces Assassinate Sheikh Ahmed Yassin,” Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Ref. 51/2004, 22 March 2004.
2. “Ahmed Yassin: 19 Years since the Martyrdom of the Sheikh of Palestinian Resistance, Founder of Hamas,” Al Jazeera Mubasher, 22 March 2023.
3. “Israel Assassinates Sheikh Ahmed Yassin,” Al Jazeera Net, 22 March 2004.
4. Security Council, 4934th meeting, 25 March 2004, draft resolution S/2004/240.
5. Commission on Human Rights, special sitting on the assassination of the Hamas leader, summary record, 24 March 2004.