Jabalia Massacre 2004: 17 Days of “Days of Penitence” in Gaza

From the evening of 28 September to 16 October 2004, Israeli occupation forces invaded Jabalia camp and the northern Gaza Strip in an operation they called “Days of Penitence,” the largest in the Strip since the start of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Over 17 days, 107 Palestinians were killed and 431 wounded, more than 90 homes in the camp were destroyed, and hundreds were made homeless. [1] [2]

UNRWA Commissioner-General Peter Hansen described what happened as “a gross violation of international and humanitarian law,” [2] and when the Security Council tried to demand that Israel halt the operation, the United States struck down the draft resolution with its veto. [3]

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The 2004 Jabalia massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Duration	17 days: from the evening of 28 September to 16 October 2004 [1] [2]
Place	Jabalia camp and the towns of Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia, northern Gaza Strip [1] [4]
Perpetrator	The Golani and Givati brigades with tanks and helicopters, on the orders of Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz [4] [1]
Killed	107 according to UNRWA; 101, including 29 children, by 8 October according to the Ministry of Health [2] [1]
Wounded	431 according to UNRWA; 392, including 168 children, by 8 October [2] [1]
Destruction	More than 90 homes in Jabalia, 675 made homeless, and extensive land razing [2] [1]
Security Council	A US veto of a draft resolution demanding a halt to military operations [3]

Jabalia camp

Jabalia camp was established after the Nakba beside the town of Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip, when thousands of Palestinians from the villages and towns of southern Palestine took refuge there; its residents live on no more than 1.4 square kilometers. It was there that the spark of the Stone Intifada was lit in 1987. [5] In 2004 the camp had about 103,646 registered refugees. [1] It was not the camp's first massacre of the Al-Aqsa Intifada: it had been preceded by the Jabalia camp massacre of March 2003 .

"Days of Penitence": the invasion

At about 10:30 p.m. on Tuesday, 28 September 2004, occupation forces pushed into the northern Gaza Strip; reinforcements arrived on 30 September, when Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz announced a "large scale and prolonged operation" called "Days of Penitence." [1] The Golani and Givati brigades took part, with no set end date, on the pretext of stopping Qassam rocket fire. [4]

Occupation forces set up military positions in Beit Hanoun and Jabalia and imposed a closure that split the Strip into three parts. [4] Bulldozers razed wide areas between Sikka Street and Salah al-Din Street, [1] electricity and water were cut in parts of the camp, tanks knocked down the walls of two UNRWA schools and destroyed a kindergarten serving 500 children, and all schools in Jabalia, Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia were closed. [6] [1] Some 600 families remained trapped in their homes from the start of the invasion. [1]

Shells on crowds

On 5 October 2004 a tank shell landed on a crowd of residents in the camp, killing at least seven and wounding twenty, some of whom lost limbs. That day alone 22 were killed, including three children and a 60-year-old man, and hospitals in the northern Strip declared a maximum state of emergency. [4] Among the wounded was photographer Iyad al-Dahdouh of the Ramattan agency. [4]

The toll

Date	Killed	Wounded	Source
1 October (after 3 days)	38	154	Palestine Red Crescent (via OCHA) [6]
5 October	82, including 24 children	316, including over 110 children	OCHA [7]
8 October	101, including 29 children	392, including 168 children	Palestinian Ministry of Health (via OCHA) [1]
After the withdrawal (16 October)	107	431, and 675 made homeless	UNRWA [2]

The UNRWA Commissioner-General said more than 90 homes had been destroyed in Jabalia, a “low estimate” expected to rise, and that 600–700 people had been made homeless, on top of some 20,000 already homeless in Gaza. Much of the camp was reduced to rubble. [2]

The international response and the US veto

On 5 October 2004 the Security Council voted on a draft resolution submitted by Algeria, Pakistan and Tunisia that “demands the immediate cessation of all military operations in the area of Northern Gaza” and called on Israel to allow UN and aid workers safe access. Eleven members voted in favour and three abstained, but the United States struck it down with its veto. [3]

The UN Secretary-General said there was “no military solution to the conflict” and expressed grief for the children killed and wounded. Hansen said: “Most of what we have seen here in Jabalya over the last two weeks is a gross violation of international and humanitarian law.” [2] Nabil Abu Rudeineh, adviser to President Arafat, described the operation as mass massacres and serious destruction, and the Palestinian Authority called on the Security Council and the Quartet to intervene immediately. [4]

Read about the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

Seventeen “Days of Penitence” turned Jabalia camp, one of the most densely populated places on earth, into rubble: 107 killed, more than 400 wounded, nearly half of them children, hundreds made homeless, and homes, schools and kindergartens destroyed. When the world tried to demand an end to the massacre, the US veto gave it cover. The 2004 Jabalia massacre remains a testament to the collective punishment of an entire camp, whose people held firm despite everything.

Frequently asked questions about the 2004 Jabalia massacre

When did the 2004 Jabalia massacre take place?

During the Israeli operation “Days of Penitence,” from the evening of 28 September to 16 October 2004.

How many people were killed in the 2004 Jabalia massacre?

107 according to UNRWA, with 431 wounded and 675 made homeless; at least 29 children were among the dead by 8 October.

What was Operation “Days of Penitence”?

It was the military operation announced by Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz in the northern Gaza Strip, the largest in the Strip since the start of the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

What happened at the Security Council during the massacre?

Eleven members supported a draft resolution demanding a halt to military operations in northern Gaza on 5 October 2004, but the United States struck it down with its veto.

How many homes were destroyed in Jabalia?

More than 90 according to UNRWA, in what it called a low estimate, leaving hundreds of people homeless.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “Humanitarian Situation Update: Northern Gaza,” OCHA, 8 October 2004.
2. “Chronological Review of Events Relating to the Question of Palestine: October 2004,” Division for Palestinian Rights, United Nations.
3. “Security Council Fails to Adopt Text Demanding End to Military

Operations in Northern Gaza," United Nations, 5 October 2004.
4. "22 Martyrs in an Israeli Massacre in Jabalia," Al Jazeera Net, 5 October 2004.
5. "Jabalia Camp: Where the Spark of the Stone Intifada Began," Al Jazeera Net, 8 January 2024.
6. "Humanitarian Situation Update: Jabalia Camp," OCHA, 1 October 2004.
7. "Humanitarian Situation Update: Northern Gaza," OCHA, 5 October 2004.