Al-Wehda Street Massacre 2021: The Kawlak and Abu al-Auf Families

At dawn on Sunday, 16 May 2021, during the Israeli assault on Gaza, occupation warplanes launched a series of strikes on al-Wehda Street, the main thoroughfare of central Gaza City, flattening three residential buildings on their occupants without any warning. Forty-four civilians were killed, including 18 children and 14 women, 22 of them from the al-Kawlak family alone. [1] [2]

The al-Wehda Street massacre was the deadliest single strike of that war, [2] and Human Rights Watch said it found “no evidence of military targets in the area,” and that the attack “apparently amounts to a war crime.” [1]

Contents

1. The al-Wehda Street massacre at a glance
2. The massacre: dawn on 16 May 2021
3. The families wiped out
4. The tunnel pretext
5. War crimes, according to Human Rights Watch
6. Frequently asked questions
7. Sources and references

The al-Wehda Street massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Dawn on Sunday, 16 May 2021, at about 1 a.m. [2]
Place	Al-Wehda Street, the main thoroughfare of central Gaza City [1] [3]

Item	Details
Weapon	US-made GBU-31 guided bombs, with no warning to residents [1]
Destruction	Three residential buildings, including those of Amin and Moein al-Kawlak and the Abu al-Auf building [1] [3]
Killed	44 civilians, including 18 children and 14 women [1]
Al-Kawlak family	22 killed from the family alone [1] [2]
Wounded	About 50, most of them children and women [3]

The massacre: dawn on 16 May 2021

From about 1:00 to 2:10 a.m., occupation jets launched a large number of strikes on Gaza City, one of which hit two four-storey residential buildings on al-Wehda Street owned by Amin Mohammed al-Kawlak and Moein Mohammed al-Kawlak, next to the Abu al-Auf family building near the al-Shanti bakery; the buildings collapsed on their residents. [3] [2]

The strikes used US-made GBU-31 guided bombs, and residents received no evacuation warning. [1] Azzam al-Kawlak, who was in his top-floor apartment, said: “The floor cracked below our feet and the furniture was thrown to the wall.” [2]

Ambulance and civil defence crews searched under the rubble for long hours, and the toll rose from 26 in the first hours to 33, then to 42. [4] [3] About 50 were wounded, most of them children and women. [3]

The families wiped out

The strikes wiped out whole generations of entire families, from an 85-year-old grandfather to a one-year-old infant: [4]

Family	Among the killed
Al-Kawlak family	Amin Mohammed al-Kawlak (85), Fawaz Shukri al-Kawlak (55), Ezzat Moein al-Kawlak (44) and his children Adam (3) and Zaid (8), Sameh Fawaz al-Kawlak (28) and his son Qusai (1), Reham Fawaz al-Kawlak (30), Amal Jamil al-Kawlak (34), Saadiya Yousef al-Kawlak (28), Taher Shukri al-Kawlak (23), Abdulhamid Fawaz al-Kawlak (22), Ayat Ibrahim al-Kawlak (19), Mohammed Awni al-Kawlak (17), Ahmed Shukri al-Kawlak (17), and others, bringing the family's toll to 22 [4] [1]
Abu al-Auf family	Dr. Ayman Abu al-Auf (50), head of internal medicine at al-Shifa Medical Complex, and Rawan Alaa Abu al-Auf (19), along with Dima Rami al-Faranji (16), Moein Ahmed al-Aloul (66) and Lo'ay Mohammed Odeh (54) from the same building [4] [3]
Ishkontana family	The mother Abeer Nimr Ishkontana (30) and her children Dana (9), Zain (8) and Yahya (5) [4]

Eight bodies of the al-Kawlak family were recovered from one building, and 14 from the building next door. [2] Awni al-Kawlak said: "I lost my livelihood and I lost my brothers and their children." [2]

The tunnel pretext

The occupation army claimed it had targeted resistance tunnels under the street and that the collapse of the homes was unintended, and its spokesman acknowledged the military may have "miscalculated" in choosing the ordnance. [1] [2] Awni al-Kawlak asked what he was supposed to do with Israel's implicit admission of error. [2]

War crimes, according to Human Rights Watch

On 27 July 2021 Human Rights Watch published its investigation of three Israeli strikes on Gaza, of which the al-Wehda Street strikes were the most serious. It found "no evidence of military targets in the area," stressed that "an attack that is not directed at a specific military objective is unlawful," and said the attacks it investigated "apparently amount to war crimes." [1]

Read about the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

At dawn on 16 May 2021, three buildings in the heart of Gaza were wiped out, and with them entire families: 44 civilians, including 18 children and 14 women, 22 from the al-Kawlak family alone, and a doctor who had spent his life treating the sick. The al-Wehda Street massacre remains a testament to the bombing of homes on their residents without warning, and to a war crime for which no one has been held accountable.

Frequently asked questions about the al-Wehda Street massacre

When did the al-Wehda Street massacre take place?

It took place at dawn on Sunday, 16 May 2021, during the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip.

How many people were killed in the al-Wehda Street massacre?

Forty-four civilians were killed, including 18 children and 14 women, according to Human Rights Watch.

How many members of the al-Kawlak family were killed?

The al-Kawlak family lost 22 members, the oldest Amin Mohammed al-Kawlak (85) and the youngest the infant Qusai (1).

Who was the doctor killed on al-Wehda Street?

Dr. Ayman Abu al-Auf, head of internal medicine at al-Shifa Medical Complex, was killed with several members of his family.

Was the al-Wehda Street massacre considered a war crime?

Human Rights Watch said it found no evidence of military targets in the area and that the attack apparently amounts to a war crime.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “Israeli War Crimes against Palestinians Apparent in Gaza War: HRW,” Ahram Online, 27 July 2021.
2. “Gaza’s Bereaved Civilians Fear Justice Will Never Come,” Asharq Al-Awsat, 2 June 2021.
3. “42 Martyrs in the al-Wehda Street Massacre in Central Gaza City,” Dunia al-Watan, 16 May 2021.
4. “Martyrs of the Occupation’s Massacre on al-Wehda: 26 Palestinians, 16 from One Family,” El Watan (Egypt), 16 May 2021.