Jaffa Saraya Massacre 1948: Stern Gang Bombs the National Committee HQ

On 4 January 1948 the Zionist Stern Gang detonated a booby-trapped truck at the Saraya building facing the Jaffa clock tower, the headquarters of the city's Arab National Committee, bringing it down on those inside. Dozens were killed and about a hundred wounded, most of them elderly people and children. [1] [2] [3]

The Jaffa municipality distributed food to needy children in the building, so among the victims were children who had come for help. [1] It is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people in the months before the Nakba.

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The Saraya massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	4 January 1948 [3] [1]
Place	The Saraya (the Ottoman government house) facing the Jaffa clock tower, outside the Old City [4] [1]

Item	Details
Building	Headquarters of the Arab National Committee in Jaffa; the municipality also ran social services and food distribution for needy children there [3] [1]
Perpetrator	The Zionist Stern Gang (Lehi) [1] [2] [4]
Method	A booby-trapped truck detonated at the building, destroying it [5] [4]
Killed	Dozens: 14 to 17 according to press accounts, over 40 according to a UN document [1] [2] [3]
Wounded	98 to over 100, most of them elderly people and children [3] [1] [2]

The Saraya: the heart of Jaffa

The New Saraya was built around 1897 outside the walls of Old Jaffa as the government house, replacing the Old Saraya inside the town, and was funded by the city's notables and wealthy residents. A few years later a clock tower was added in the middle of the square in front of it, making the building one of the first sights for anyone arriving in Jaffa by land or sea. [4]

By late 1947 the Saraya was the headquarters of the Arab National Committee that ran Jaffa's affairs, [3] and the municipality ran social services there, including food distribution for needy children. [1]

The massacre: 4 January 1948

After the partition resolution of November 1947, attacks by Zionist gangs on Palestinian towns and villages intensified. On 4 January 1948 the Stern Gang drove a booby-trapped truck into Clock Tower Square and detonated it at the Saraya; the building collapsed and the surrounding structures were damaged. [1] [5] [4]

The gang claimed the building was the headquarters of an Arab military group threatening Tel Aviv, [4] but those under the rubble were mostly elderly people and children sheltering in a facility that cared for the poor and orphans. [2]

The writer Abed Abu Shehadeh recounts that his grandfather Ismail was working on Salameh Street when the blast went off. He ran to the site and began clearing rubble in search of survivors, and when he saw the remains of children beneath the debris he lost consciousness. His family went on calling the victims “the children of the Saraya.” [1]

The toll and the accounts

Source	Date	Perpetrator	Toll
Noon Post / Middle East Eye	4 January 1948	Stern Gang (Lehi)	14 killed, 98 wounded [1]
Al Jazeera Encyclopedia	Early 1948	Stern Gang / Haganah	17 killed, over 100 wounded [2] [6]
UN document A/9801	4 January 1948	Haganah (in British Army uniforms)	Over 40 killed, 98 wounded [3]
Archnet	Early 1948	Stern Gang (Lehi)	Dozens killed and wounded [4]
Massacre lists (WAFA, Arabi21, Yaffa 48)	8 January 1948	“Zionist gangs”	70 killed, dozens wounded [7] [5] [8]

This article adopts the date of 4 January 1948 given by the detailed sources. The figure of 70 killed and the date of 8 January appear in massacre lists without details. [7] [5] The same lists mention a second bombing “beside the Old Saraya” by the Irgun that killed 30, [5] [7] [8] but we found nothing documenting two separate bombings; the two accounts most likely describe the same event.

After the massacre

The following night, 5 January 1948, the Haganah blew up the Semiramis Hotel in Jerusalem, killing 26 civilians. [6] the Semiramis Hotel massacre

The Al Jazeera Encyclopedia counts the Saraya bombing among the causes of Jaffa’s Nakba, as it drove many of its people to leave after they saw the brutality of the Zionist gangs. [2] If the gangs would target children who had come for food,

what would they do to everyone else? That was the question Jaffa's people asked at the time. [1]

The building was almost entirely destroyed and was never rebuilt. [4]

Conclusion

The Stern Gang chose the heart of Jaffa as its target: the Saraya facing the clock tower, the National Committee's headquarters and the place where the city's needy children received food. It killed dozens, wounded about a hundred, and sowed the terror that paved the way for the expulsion of Jaffa's people months later.

Frequently asked questions about the Jaffa Saraya massacre

When did the Jaffa Saraya massacre take place?

It took place on 4 January 1948; some lists give 8 January.

Who carried out the Saraya massacre?

Most sources attribute it to the Zionist Stern Gang (Lehi); others attribute it to the Haganah.

How many people were killed in the Saraya massacre?

Dozens: 14 to 17 according to press accounts and over 40 according to a UN document, while massacre lists put it at 70. About a hundred were wounded.

What was the Saraya building?

The Ottoman government house facing the Jaffa clock tower. It was the headquarters of the Arab National Committee, and the municipality distributed food to needy children there.

Were there two massacres at the Saraya?

Some lists mention a second bombing “beside the Old Saraya,” but we found nothing documenting it; it is most likely the same event.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. Abed Abu Shehadeh, “The Nakba: The Erasure of Jaffa Is a Warning for Gaza, but History Is Not Yet Written,” Noon Post (translated from Middle East Eye), 16 May 2025.
2. “Stern: An Extremist Zionist Organisation That Took Part in the Deir Yassin Massacre,” Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, 18 February 2024.
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4. “Al-Saraya al-Jadida,” Archnet, Aga Khan Trust for Culture and MIT.
5. Hana al-Kahlout, “The Assassination of a Homeland: 37 Israeli Massacres in the Year of the Nakba,” Arabi21, 15 May 2014.
6. “The Semiramis Hotel Bombing Massacre in Jerusalem, 1948,” Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, 7 October 2024.
7. “Israeli Massacres,” Palestinian National Information Centre (WAFA).
8. “For Those Who Forgot: The Massacres in the City of Jaffa in 1948,” Yaffa 48.