

Al-Astal Children Massacre 2001: Army Bomb Kills 5 Khan Yunis Pupils

On the morning of Thursday, 22 November 2001, as five children of the al-Astal family walked to their school in Khan Yunis, an explosive device planted by the Israeli occupation army on their daily route blew up beneath them, tearing their bodies apart. The youngest was six years old, the eldest thirteen. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)

Three days later the occupation army admitted that it had planted the device. [\[2\]](#) It is one of [the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people](#).

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The al-Astal children massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Thursday, 22 November 2001, around 7:30 a.m. [1] [2]
Place	Al-Rabwat al-Gharbiya, near the al-Amal neighbourhood west of Khan Yunis, about 150 metres from the “Gani Tal” settlement [1]
Perpetrator	The Israeli occupation army, which admitted planting the device [2]

Item	Details
Killed	5 children of the al-Astal family, aged 6 to 13 [1] [3]
Wounded	The farmer Ahmad Dhib al-Astal [1] [2]
Demands	An international investigation into the killing of Palestinian children [4] [1]

The massacre: the road to school

At about 7:30 a.m., residents of al-Rabwat al-Gharbiya, near the al-Amal neighbourhood of Khan Yunis, heard a loud explosion. When they reached the spot they found five children whose bodies had been torn to scattered pieces, and a hole in the ground. The children could be identified only by their school bags. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)

Abd al-Majid Mustafa al-Astal, who lives about 50 metres from the site, told Al Mezan in his affidavit that occupation forces had moved into the area around midnight the night before and approached a path the children took to school every day, about 150 metres from the “Gani Tal” settlement. He said the five children were walking along the path to school when the explosion happened. [\[1\]](#)

The farmer Ahmad Dhib al-Astal, working on his land nearby, was wounded in the neck and right thigh. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)

The children

The five children were from one family, among them two brothers, sons of Na’im al-Astal, and two brothers, sons of Idris al-Astal: [\[1\]](#)

Name	Age
Muhammad Na’im Abd al-Karim al-Astal	13
Akram Na’im Abd al-Karim al-Astal	6
Anis Idris Muhammad al-Astal	10
Omar Idris Muhammad al-Astal	12

Name	Age
Muhammad Sultan Muhammad al-Astal	11

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights gives some of their ages as one year older. [\[2\]](#)

The occupation's admission

Three days later an Israeli military spokesman admitted that the children had been killed by an explosive device planted by the army, claiming it was “an ambush to Palestinian gunmen” who fired from the area. [\[2\]](#)

Yet the device was planted on a sandy path that schoolchildren walked every morning, [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) and it exploded in an area used by pedestrians, according to the letter of the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations. [\[3\]](#)

Reactions

Saeb Erekat, the Palestinian minister of local government and chief negotiator, held the occupation government “fully responsible for this crime” and said the Palestinian Authority had sent “urgent messages” to the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia. [\[5\]](#)

Al Mezan described the killing as a “massacre,” called for urgent international intervention and for those responsible to be held to account, and recalled that Palestinian children had been killed in similar ways before. [\[1\]](#) The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights called for an international investigation into the killing of Palestinian children by occupation forces. [\[4\]](#)

Conclusion

Muhammad, Akram, Anis, Omar and Muhammad left their homes that Thursday morning with their school bags and never came back. The occupation army planted its bomb on the path to their school, then admitted it and called it an “ambush.”

No one was ever held to account for killing five children from one family.

Frequently asked questions about the al-Astal children massacre

When did the al-Astal children massacre take place?

On the morning of Thursday, 22 November 2001, at about 7:30.

Where did the al-Astal children massacre take place?

In al-Rabwat al-Gharbiya, near the al-Amal neighbourhood west of Khan Yunis, about 150 metres from the “Gani Tal” settlement.

Who were the children killed?

Muhammad Na'im al-Astal (13), Akram Na'im al-Astal (6), Anis Idris al-Astal (10), Omar Idris al-Astal (12) and Muhammad Sultan al-Astal (11).

Did the occupation army admit planting the device?

Yes. Three days later an Israeli military spokesman admitted the army had planted it, claiming it was an ambush for gunmen.

What did human rights organizations demand?

Al Mezan and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights called for urgent international intervention, an international investigation and accountability for those responsible.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. [Press release 64/2001 on the killing of five children in Khan Yunis, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 22 November 2001.](#)

2. [Weekly Report on Israeli Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 28 November 2001.](#)
3. [Identical letters dated 27 November 2001 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, United Nations.](#)
4. ["Five Palestinian Children Killed by Exploding Device Planted by Israeli Forces: PCHR Appeals for International Investigation," Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 26 November 2001.](#)
5. [Al-Jazirah newspaper \(Saudi Arabia\), 23 November 2001.](#)