Aa'jleen Massacre

On the night of Wednesday, 28 August 2002, an Israeli tank at the military positions around the Netzarim settlement fired a flechette shell at the Hajin family, a farming family that had escaped the summer heat in a shed on its farmland in the Sheikh Ajlin area, south of Gaza City. Thousands of metal darts tore through the family; four of them were killed, a mother, her two sons and their cousin, and five others were wounded, including children. [1] [2] [3]

The occupation forces did not stop at the shell: soldiers fired live ammunition at the mother as she came out carrying her child, and fired on ambulances, preventing them from reaching the wounded, some of whom bled to death. The Sheikh Ajlin massacre remains one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people during the Al-Aqsa Intifada. [2] [4]

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The Sheikh Ajlin massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	The night of Wednesday, 28 August 2002 [2] [3]
Place	The Hajin family’s farmland in the Sheikh Ajlin area, south of Gaza City [1] [2]
Perpetrator	Israeli occupation forces stationed at the military positions around the Netzarim settlement [2] [4]
Weapon	A flechette tank shell spraying thousands of metal darts, followed by live fire [2] [5] [4]
Killed	4 members of the Hajin family: a mother, her two sons and their cousin [2] [4]
Wounded	5, including children [1] [4] [3]
Ambulances blocked	Occupation forces fired on ambulances and prevented them from reaching the victims [2] [4]

Sheikh Ajlin and Netzarim

Sheikh Ajlin is a coastal farming area south of Gaza City. [4] During the years of the Al-Aqsa Intifada its land lay close to the Netzarim settlement and the military positions the occupation army set up to protect it, leaving farmers’ homes and fields within range of tanks and military towers. [2] [4]

The massacre: the night of 28 August 2002

That night the Hajin family, as farmers often do on hot summer nights, was in a shed on its vineyard, about 250 meters from the Israeli military positions. [2] [3] From those positions a tank fired a flechette shell at six civilians in the shed, killing the two young men Ashraf and Nihad and their cousin Mohammed. [2] Eyewitnesses said the first they knew of any danger was when the shell burst over their heads. [3]

The mother, Rowaida, came out of the shed carrying her child to see what had happened; the soldiers opened fire on her with live ammunition, hitting her with several bullets, and she bled to death. [2]

Palestinian ambulances reached the area, but the occupation forces fired on them and prevented them from evacuating the victims. [2] According to news agencies, ambulances were kept from reaching the area for about 40 minutes, and two of the victims bled to death, [4] while the circulated Palestinian account says the obstruction lasted more than an hour.

The killed and the wounded

Name	Age	Relationship
Rowaida Ibrahim al-Hajin	41	The mother [2]
Ashraf ‘Othman al-Hajin	23	Her son [2] [3]
Nihad ‘Othman al-Hajin	17	Her son [2] [3]
Mohammed Samir al-Hajin	—	Cousin of Ashraf and Nihad [2] [3]

Five other family members were wounded. [1] [4] Sa’id, Rowaida’s three-year-old child, who came out of the shed with her, was hit by shrapnel. [2] Metal darts pierced the chest, arms and legs of the child Salah and punctured his lung, and another child needed seven months of hospital treatment. [3]

Flechette shells: a weapon of indiscriminate killing

A flechette shell is a tank shell packed with thousands of small metal darts, which bursts in the air and scatters them over a wide area. Palestinian doctors said the blast in Sheikh Ajlin sprayed thousands of darts that left the victims’ bodies “sliced and torn.” [4] [5] Human Rights Watch estimates that a single shell’s killing zone extends about 300 meters long and 90 meters wide, and described its use in a populated civilian area as “both disproportionate and indiscriminate.” [3]

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights states that all victims of flechette shells in the Gaza Strip in 2002 were civilians who took no part in hostilities and posed no threat to soldiers. On 21 October 2002 the Centre, together with Physicians for

Human Rights, petitioned to ban their use against civilians in Gaza; the Israeli state prosecution defended the weapon as an “important part” of its army’s response. [2]

Denial and impunity

An occupation army spokesman claimed that soldiers guarding the Netzarim settlement opened fire when they saw “several suspicious figures” crawling toward the settlement; Israeli Defence Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer then expressed “regret” for the killing of “Palestinian innocents.” [4] President Yasser Arafat called the massacre “a deliberate crime that aims to sabotage the peace efforts,” and the Palestinian leadership called off high-level security talks with the Israeli side. [4]

The occupation army formed a special investigation panel, which finished its work in a single week and concluded that the army had “acted appropriately,” and that the tank unit had taken “warning measures” before opening fire, which eyewitnesses denied. The panel did not interview the victims and did not examine the use of flechettes; Human Rights Watch described the investigation as “neither impartial nor thorough.” [3] No one was held accountable for killing the mother, her two sons and their cousin.

Conclusion

On a single summer night, on land they farmed with grapes, a flechette shell and the bullets of occupation soldiers killed four members of the Hajin family and wounded five others, including children, while ambulances were kept from reaching them. The occupation army then cleared itself with an internal investigation that never asked the victims. The Sheikh Ajlin massacre remains a testament to an indiscriminate weapon used against Palestinian families on their own land, and to an impunity that continues to this day.

Frequently asked questions about the Sheikh Ajlin massacre

When did the Sheikh Ajlin massacre take place?

It took place on the night of Wednesday, 28 August 2002, in the Sheikh Ajlin area south of Gaza City.

Who were the victims of the Sheikh Ajlin massacre?

Four members of the Hajin family: the mother Rowaida Ibrahim al-Hajin, her two sons Ashraf and Nihad ‘Othman al-Hajin, and their cousin Mohammed Samir al-Hajin.

What weapon was used in the Sheikh Ajlin massacre?

A flechette tank shell that scatters thousands of metal darts, followed by live fire the soldiers aimed at the mother.

How many people were wounded in the Sheikh Ajlin massacre?

Five family members were wounded, including children, the youngest being three-year-old Sa’id.

Was anyone held accountable for the Sheikh Ajlin massacre?

No; an internal occupation army investigation concluded that the soldiers had “acted appropriately,” without interviewing the victims.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “Occupation Forces Commit a Massacre against a Farming Family in the Sheikh Ajlin Area, Killing Four and Wounding Five,” Al Mezan Center for

Human Rights, August 2002.

2. “Annual Report 2002,” Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza, pp. 21–22.
3. “Promoting Impunity: The Israeli Military’s Failure to Investigate Wrongdoing,” Human Rights Watch, June 2005.
4. “Chronological Review of Events Relating to the Question of Palestine: August 2002,” Division for Palestinian Rights, United Nations.
5. “Flechette Shells Used in the Sheikh Ajlin Massacre,” Al-Dustour (Jordan), August 2002.