Beit Lahia Massacre 2005: Tank Shell Kills 7 Children of Two Families

On the morning of Tuesday, 4 January 2005, an Israeli tank fired a shell at a group of children and teenagers on their families' farmland in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza Strip, killing seven of them, aged 10 to 17: six of the Ghaben family and one of the al-Kaseeh family. Twelve were wounded, nine of them children. [1] [2]

The massacre came five days before the Palestinian presidential election and led candidate Mahmoud Abbas to call Israel "the Zionist enemy" for the first time. [1] [3] It is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Contents

1. The Beit Lahia massacre at a glance
2. The massacre: a shell on children on their land
3. The seven
4. The occupation's claim, refuted
5. "The Zionist enemy"
6. Frequently asked questions
7. Sources and references

The Beit Lahia massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Tuesday, 4 January 2005, around 7:40 a.m. [2] [1]
Place	Farmland on Hatabiyeh Street in Beit Lahia, near the "Nisanit" and "Elei Sinai" settlements [2] [1]

Item	Details
Perpetrator	An Israeli tank that fired a shell from a position near the Nisanit settlement [2] [1]
Killed	7 children and teenagers aged 10 to 17: 6 of the Ghaben family and one of the al-Kaseeh family [1] [2]
Wounded	12, including 9 children, according to Al Mezan [2]
Political timing	Five days before the Palestinian presidential election [1]

The massacre: a shell on children on their land

At about 7:40 a.m. an Israeli tank positioned near the “Nisanit” settlement fired a shell at a group of Palestinians on Hatabiyeh Street in Beit Lahia. [2] The shell directly hit children working on their farmland, south of the fence separating the “Elei Sinai” and “Nisanit” settlements from the town. [1]

The father of one victim said the children were playing in a family-owned grove about 300 metres from the settlement, and that the tank had a clear view of the area. [2]

The massacre came about 12 hours after occupation forces withdrew from Beit Hanoun, ending a two-day incursion. [2]

The seven

Name	Age
Hani Muhammad Kamel Ghaben	17
Muhammad Hasan Mousa Ghaben	17
Bassam Kamel Muhammad Ghaben	17
Jaber Abdullah Ghaben	16
Mahmoud Kamel Muhammad Ghaben	12
Rajeh Ghassan Kamel Ghaben	10
Jibril Abd al-Fattah al-Kaseeh	16

Ages are as given by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights; Al Mezan gives some of them as a year or two younger. Among the dead were brothers, sons of Kamel Ghaben. [1] [2]

Among the wounded were children rushed into surgery at al-Shifa Hospital, their bodies torn by shrapnel. [1]

The occupation's claim, refuted

The occupation army claimed it had fired on Palestinians seen launching rockets and that it targeted members of the resistance. The army's north Gaza commander expressed regret "if civilians were indeed hurt." [3] [1]

But the preliminary investigations of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights refuted this claim, confirming that all the victims were children working on their land. [1] The letter of Palestine's Permanent Observer to the UN confirmed that tanks shelled a farming area and that most of the dead were children under 18. [4]

Al Mezan described it as an excessive and disproportionate use of force in densely populated areas and a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention. [2]

"The Zionist enemy"

At an election rally, Mahmoud Abbas, the front-runner for the presidency, said the victims had fallen "to the shells of the Zionist enemy," the first time he had used the term. [3]

The occupation's vice-premier, Ehud Olmert, called Abbas's remarks "intolerable and unacceptable" and said they could not serve as a basis for cooperation. [3] In other words, it was not the killing of seven children that drew the occupation government's anger, but the naming of the killer.

Conclusion

Hani, Bassam, Mahmoud, Rajeh, Jaber, Muhammad and Jibril were on their families' land that Tuesday morning, in full view of an occupation tank, which fired a shell that killed them all. When Abbas called the killer "the Zionist enemy," the occupation government was angered by the description, not the crime.

Frequently asked questions about the 2005 Beit Lahia massacre

When did the 2005 Beit Lahia massacre take place?

On the morning of Tuesday, 4 January 2005, at about 7:40.

How many people were killed in the 2005 Beit Lahia massacre?

Seven children and teenagers aged 10 to 17: six of the Ghaben family and one of the al-Kaseeh family; twelve were wounded.

What were the children doing when they were shelled?

They were working on their farmland or playing in their family's grove, about 300 metres from the Nisanit settlement.

How did the occupation justify the massacre?

It claimed it targeted rocket launchers, but the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights confirmed that all the victims were children on their land.

What did Mahmoud Abbas say about the massacre?

He said the victims fell "to the shells of the Zionist enemy," and Olmert called the remark "intolerable and unacceptable."

Sources and references

1. “5 Days before the Palestinian Presidential Election, a Tank Shell Fired by Israeli Occupation Forces Kills 7 Palestinian Children,” Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 4 January 2005.
2. Press release 1/2005 on the shelling in Beit Lahia, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 4 January 2005.
3. “Israeli Tanks Shell Gaza Children,” Al Jazeera English, 5 January 2005.
4. Identical letters dated 4 January 2005 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, document A/ES-10/293 – S/2005/2.