Al-Fakhura School Massacre 2009: Israeli Shells on Jabalia Refugees

On 6 January 2009, during the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, occupation forces fired at least four mortar shells around UNRWA's al-Fakhura school in Jabalia camp, which was sheltering more than 1,300 displaced people. At least 35 civilians were killed according to the Goldstone report, and 42 according to hospital sources, with dozens wounded. [1] [2]

UNRWA had given the occupation army the school's coordinates, and the UN Fact-Finding Mission concluded the attack was indiscriminate and disproportionate. [2] [1] It is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Contents

1. The al-Fakhura massacre at a glance
2. A school turned shelter
3. The massacre: shells on a crowded street
4. The toll: what do the sources say?
5. The occupation's account and its contradictions
6. The Goldstone report
7. Frequently asked questions
8. Sources and references

The al-Fakhura massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Tuesday, 6 January 2009, during the Israeli war on Gaza [1] [3]

Item	Details
Place	Around UNRWA’s al-Fakhura school and al-Fakhura Street, Jabalia camp [1] [2]
Sheltering in the school	More than 1,300 displaced people [1]
Weapons	At least 4 mortar shells [1]
Killed	At least 35 per the Goldstone report, 42 per hospital sources [1] [2]
Wounded	About 40 per Goldstone, 55 per UNRWA [1] [2]
Goldstone finding	An indiscriminate and disproportionate attack violating international law and the right to life [1]

A school turned shelter

As Israeli bombardment of the northern Gaza Strip intensified in the war that began on 27 December 2008, hundreds of civilians fleeing Beit Lahia and Jabalia took refuge in UNRWA’s al-Fakhura school. When the massacre took place, more than 1,300 displaced people were in the school. [1] [2]

UNRWA had provided the occupation army with the coordinates of all its installations in the Gaza Strip, and the school was clearly marked as a UN facility. [2] [4]

The massacre: shells on a crowded street

Occupation forces fired at least four mortar shells at the al-Fakhura junction. One landed in the courtyard of a family home, killing 11 people gathered there; three fell on crowded al-Fakhura Street, killing at least 24 more and wounding about 40. [1]

A school guard described the wounded and dead lying in the street. [3] John Ging, UNRWA’s director of operations in Gaza, said three artillery shells landed at the school’s perimeter, that “there is nowhere safe in Gaza,” and that leaders were “responsible for these deaths.” [2]

The toll: what do the sources say?

Source	Killed	Wounded
Gaza hospital sources	42	Dozens [2]
Goldstone report	At least 35	About 40 [1]
John Ging (UNRWA), initial estimate	30	55 [2]
Human Rights Watch (citing media)	30–40	— [3]

Reports indicated that many of the dead were women and children. [2]

The occupation’s account and its contradictions

Army spokeswoman Avital Leibovich said a mortar had been fired from the school and that forces responded with one mortar shell, adding that she was “not apologizing” for the attack and had “no information” on whether the army had the school’s coordinates. [2] A later army statement claimed Hamas “terrorist elements” were among the dead, without giving a source. [3]

But UNRWA stated that no mortar was fired from the school and that there were no militants inside it. [3] [4] The occupation army later admitted in private briefings to diplomats that the fire had come from outside the school, not from inside it. [4]

The Goldstone report

The UN Fact-Finding Mission led by Justice Richard Goldstone did not rule out that the attack responded to mortar fire by an armed group, but found the Israeli account marred by inconsistencies, contradictions and factual inaccuracies. [1]

The Mission concluded that firing at least four mortar shells to kill a small number of individuals, in a place full of civilians, could not meet the test of proportionality, and that the attack was indiscriminate, violating international law and the right to life of the Palestinians killed. [1]

Human Rights Watch called on the Security Council to establish a fact-finding commission into violations, including this attack. [3]

Conclusion

The people of Beit Lahia and Jabalia fled the bombardment to a school flying the UN flag, whose coordinates UNRWA had given the occupation army. Yet its shells rained down on the crowded street outside, killing at least 35. Al-Fakhura school would witness new massacres in the genocidal war on Gaza in 2023.

Frequently asked questions about the al-Fakhura school massacre

When did the first al-Fakhura school massacre take place?

On 6 January 2009, during the Israeli war on Gaza.

How many people were killed in the al-Fakhura school massacre?

At least 35 according to the Goldstone report, and 42 according to Gaza hospital sources.

Did the shells land inside the school?

They fell on crowded al-Fakhura Street around the school and in the courtyard of a nearby home, where displaced people and residents were.

Did the occupation know where the school was?

Yes. UNRWA had given the occupation army the coordinates of all its installations, and the school bore UN markings.

What did the Goldstone report say about the al-Fakhura massacre?

It concluded that the attack was indiscriminate and disproportionate, violating international law and the right to life.

Sources and references

1. Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (Goldstone Report), document A/HRC/12/48, September 2009.
2. “42 Killed by Israeli Fire at UN School in Jabaliya Refugee Camp,” Right to Education Campaign, Birzeit University, 6 January 2009.
3. “Gaza: Israeli Attack on School Needs Full UN Investigation,” Human Rights Watch, 8 January 2009.
4. Alkarama statement on the shelling of al-Fakhura school, 9 January 2009.