Beit Hanoun UNRWA School Massacre 2014: Shells on Waiting Refugees

On the afternoon of Thursday, 24 July 2014, during the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, occupation shells landed in the yard of UNRWA's Beit Hanoun Elementary School, where displaced families had gathered to prepare for evacuation. Between 12 and 16 civilians were killed, including children and women, and dozens were wounded. [1] [2] [3]

UNRWA sent the school's coordinates to the occupation army twice a day, and a UN Board of Inquiry concluded that the incident was attributable to the occupation army. [1] It is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people, eight years after the 2006 Beit Hanoun massacre.

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The Beit Hanoun school massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Thursday, 24 July 2014, around 3 p.m. [1] [2]

Item	Details
Place	UNRWA Beit Hanoun Elementary Co-educational School, Qa’at al-Wad area, northern Gaza Strip [1] [2]
Sheltering in the school	Between 450 and 800 people displaced from border areas [1] [2]
Weapons	At least two 120 mm mortar rounds per the UN, 5 tank shells per PCHR [1] [2]
Killed	Between 12 and 16, including children and women [1] [3] [2]
Wounded	Between 93 and 200, depending on the source [1] [2] [3]
UN finding	The incident is attributable to the occupation army [1]

A school turned shelter

After the occupation announced its ground operation on 17 July 2014 and ordered residents of border areas to evacuate through phone calls and leaflets, many families from the north of the Strip fled to the UNRWA school in Beit Hanoun. [2] The school was designated an emergency shelter on 18 July and initially housed 2,000 to 4,000 displaced people. [1]

As shelling intensified around the school, UNRWA could no longer provide food or services from 23 July. The ICRC evacuated about 40 people; others stayed because they had nowhere else safe to go. [2] On the day of the massacre UNRWA asked the occupation army for a window to evacuate the displaced, which was not granted before the shelling. [1]

The massacre: shells on the school yard

At around 3 p.m. there were about 450 displaced people in the school according to the UN, and about 800 according to UNRWA sources cited by PCHR. [1] [2] Families had gathered in the school yard preparing to leave, after UNRWA told them it intended to close the shelter. [2]

A 120 mm mortar round landed in the middle of the school yard and another on

the steps at the entrance, according to the UN Board of Inquiry. [1] PCHR said occupation tanks that had moved into Beit Hanoun fired five shells at the yard. [2] The wounded were taken to Kamal Adwan, al-Awda and al-Shifa hospitals, many in serious condition. [2]

The victims

In its preliminary statement PCHR published the names of eleven people killed, the youngest two-year-old Suha Musleh, seven of them of the al-Shenbari family: [2]

Name	Age
Awad Abu Ouda	39
Bilal al-Shenbari	21
Abed Rabbo Jamal al-Shenbari	17
Suha Musleh	2
Muhammad al-Kafarna	15
Fatma al-Shenbari	47
Abed Rabbo Shaiboub al-Shenbari	16
Falastin al-Shenbari	40
Mariam al-Shenbari	11
Ali al-Shenbari	9
Hassan al-Athamna	59

The death toll later rose according to other sources. [3] [1]

The toll: what do the sources say?

Source	Killed	Wounded
Al Jazeera Net (day of the massacre)	16	More than 120, elsewhere 200 [3]
UN Board of Inquiry	12–14	93 [1]

Source	Killed	Wounded
Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (preliminary)	11	110, including 55 children and 31 women [2]

The UN Board of Inquiry

The UN Secretary-General established a Board of Inquiry into attacks on UN premises in Gaza in 2014. It concluded that the incident at the Beit Hanoun school was attributable to the occupation army, and that the school was among the premises whose coordinates were sent to the occupation twice a day. [1]

Witnesses said there was no militant activity inside or near the school, while the occupation claimed rockets had been fired from and around the school and that the school was not the object of an attack. [1] The Israeli Military Advocate General ordered a criminal investigation; as of August 2016 UNRWA said the investigations were “still ongoing.” [1] [4]

PCHR described the shelling as a war crime, indiscriminate and disproportionate, and called for those responsible to be brought before the International Criminal Court. [2]

Conclusion

The al-Shenbari, Abu Ouda, al-Kafarna and other families fled the shelling on the Beit Hanoun border to a school flying the UN flag, whose coordinates the occupation forces knew. As they gathered in its yard waiting to be evacuated, the shells fell on them. Years later, no one has been held to account.

Frequently asked questions about the Beit Hanoun UNRWA school massacre

When did the Beit Hanoun UNRWA school massacre take place?

On the afternoon of Thursday, 24 July 2014, during the Israeli war on the Gaza

Strip.

How many people were killed in the Beit Hanoun school massacre?

Between 12 and 14 according to the UN Board of Inquiry, and 16 according to Al Jazeera Net, including children and women.

What were the displaced people doing when the shells hit?

They had gathered in the school yard preparing to evacuate, after UNRWA told them it intended to close the shelter.

Did the occupation know where the school was?

Yes. UNRWA sent its coordinates to the occupation army twice a day.

What did the UN Board of Inquiry find?

It found the incident attributable to the occupation army, which fired at least two 120 mm mortar rounds.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. Secretary-General’s summary of the report of the UN Headquarters Board of Inquiry into incidents in Gaza in 2014, 27 April 2015, via the Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question.
2. Palestinian Centre for Human Rights statement on the shelling of the UNRWA school in Beit Hanoun, 25 July 2014.
3. “About 120 Killed and a UNRWA School Shelled in Gaza,” Al Jazeera Net, 24 July 2014.
4. Statement on behalf of UNRWA spokesperson Chris Gunness on the IDF closing the criminal investigation into the Rafah school shelling, 26

August 2016.