Khan Yunis Massacre 1956: 275 Palestinians Killed in the Suez War

On 3 November 1956, during the Israeli occupation army's seizure of the Gaza Strip in the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt, its forces stormed the town of Khan Yunis and the adjacent refugee camp, rounded up the men and shot them in the squares and inside homes. 275 Palestinians were killed according to UNRWA's list: 140 refugees and 135 residents of the town. [1] [2]

Nine days later the occupation committed another massacre in Rafah. [1] It is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

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The 1956 Khan Yunis massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	3 November 1956 [1] [2]
Place	The town of Khan Yunis and the adjacent refugee camp, southern Gaza Strip [1]

Item	Details
Perpetrator	The Israeli occupation army during its occupation of the Gaza Strip in the Tripartite Aggression [2] [3]
Killed	275 according to UNRWA’s list: 140 refugees and 135 residents of Khan Yunis [1]
Method	Males aged 16 to 50 rounded up and shot in public squares; others killed in their homes [2] [3]
Aftermath	A mass grave of 40 men shot in the back of the head [2] [3]

The Tripartite Aggression and the occupation of the Strip

After President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956, Britain, France and Israel agreed at a secret meeting in Sèvres on 24 October 1956 to attack Egypt. On 29 October Israel attacked Egyptian positions in Sinai. [2] [3]

After a ceasefire was declared on 2 November, occupation forces overran Rafah and Gaza, then under Egyptian administration, and shelled Khan Yunis in response to its people’s resistance. [2] [3]

The massacre: 3 November 1956

Occupation forces dropped leaflets warning residents against resisting, then ordered males aged 16 to 50 out over loudspeakers. They gathered them in public squares and opened fire on them. Those who stayed in their homes were killed in front of their families. [2] [3]

A curfew was imposed, leaving the bodies in the streets and under rubble for long periods, and the occupation prevented residents from retrieving them. [2] [3]

The UNRWA report

The Director of UNRWA received a list of 275 people killed in Khan Yunis on 3 November 1956: 140 refugees and 135 residents of the town, with names supplied

by sources the Director considered trustworthy. [1]

The occupation authorities claimed there had been resistance to the occupation and that refugees had taken part. But the refugees said all resistance had ended, and that many unarmed civilians were killed while soldiers searched for men with weapons. [1]

Although the UN documented these figures, it did not hold the occupation army responsible, and no legal action was taken against its commanders. [2]

The mass grave

After the occupation withdrew from Gaza and Sinai in March 1957, a mass grave holding the bodies of 40 Palestinian men, shot in the back of the head, was found near Khan Yunis. [2] [3] The remains of some victims were found in 2003, 47 years after the massacre. [2]

Nine days later: Rafah

On 12 November 1956, during a “screening” operation by the occupation army in Rafah, 111 people were killed according to UNRWA’s list: 103 refugees, seven residents and one Egyptian. According to UNRWA, some residents did not hear the loudspeaker announcements and there was too little time to reach the screening points; many ran toward them, and the soldiers “apparently panicked and opened fire.” [1]

Conclusion

In the first days of the 1956 occupation of the Gaza Strip, the occupation army gathered the men of Khan Yunis and its camp in the squares and shot them, and killed others in their homes in front of their families, leaving at least 275 dead. Nine days later it did the same in Rafah. Both massacres went unpunished, even though the UN itself documented the victims’ names.

Frequently asked questions about the 1956 Khan Yunis massacre

When did the 1956 Khan Yunis massacre take place?

On 3 November 1956, during the occupation of the Gaza Strip in the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt.

How many people were killed in the 1956 Khan Yunis massacre?

275 according to UNRWA's list: 140 refugees and 135 residents of Khan Yunis.

How was the Khan Yunis massacre carried out?

Occupation soldiers gathered males aged 16 to 50 in the squares and shot them, and killed others inside their homes.

What mass grave was found after the massacre?

A grave near Khan Yunis holding the bodies of 40 men shot in the back of the head, found after the occupation withdrew in March 1957.

How is the Khan Yunis massacre related to the 1956 Rafah massacre?

The Rafah massacre took place nine days later, on 12 November 1956, killing 111 people according to UNRWA.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. UNRWA, Special Report of the Director, document A/3212/Add.1, 15 December 1956.

2. Abdelkader Ben Messaoud, “Committed in 1956, Its Last Victims Found in 2003: The Khan Yunis Massacre, One of Israel’s Worst in Gaza,” Arabic Post, 11 November 2023.
3. “Looking Back at the 1956 Khan Yunis Massacre,” Jordan News, citing Al-Ghad, 13 November 2023.