Al-Daraj Massacre 2002: A One-Ton Bomb on a Crowded Gaza District

Shortly before midnight on 22 July 2002, two Israeli F-16 warplanes dropped a one-ton bomb on a residential building in the crowded al-Daraj neighbourhood of Gaza City to assassinate Salah Shehadeh, commander-in-chief of the Qassam Brigades, killing 15 Palestinians with him, 9 of them children, and wounding about 140. [1] [2]

The occupation chose to drop a bomb of this size on a crowded residential neighbourhood at midnight. The Al Mezan Center for Human Rights called the bombing a war crime, and the massacre is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people. [3]

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The al-Daraj massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Shortly before midnight on 22 July 2002 [3] [1]
Place	The densely populated residential neighbourhood of al-Daraj in Gaza City [1] [3]

Item	Details
Weapon	Two F-16s dropped a one-ton bomb [1] [2]
Target	Salah Shehadeh, commander-in-chief of the Qassam Brigades [4] [1]
Killed	15, among them 9 children and 4 women, in addition to Shehadeh [2] [1]
Wounded	About 140 to 145 [2] [1]
Destruction	3 buildings collapsed and 20 damaged [2] [3]

The one-ton bomb

Salah Shehadeh, founder of Hamas's military wing, was at the top of the occupation's wanted list in Gaza. [4] [3] Shortly before midnight two F-16s dropped a one-ton bomb on a densely populated residential area in al-Daraj. [1]

The bomb destroyed the targeted two-storey building, owned by Iyad Abu Jahl, and the building next to it, and damaged several nearby homes. [3] The Palestine Chronology says the strike brought down 3 buildings and heavily damaged 20 others. [2]

The victims

Shehadeh's wife and one of his daughters were killed with him, [4] as was his aide, Zaher Nassar. [1] Most of the victims were neighbours, among them six children from the Matar family alone. [3]

These are the names of the eleven victims documented by Al Mezan the following day, eight of them children: [3]

Name	Age
Diana Ra'id Matar	5 years
Muhammad Ra'id Matar	4 years
Ayman Ra'id Matar	18 months

Name	Age
Alaa’ Muhammad Matar	11 years
Dina Rami Matar	2 months
Iman Hassan Matar	27 years
Muna Fahmi al-Hwiti	30 years
Muhammad Mahmud al-Hwiti	16 years
Subhi Mahmud al-Hwiti	4.5 years
Ahmad Muhammad al-Shawa	5 years
Muhammad Mahmud al-Shawa	40 years

The toll

Source	Killed	Wounded
Palestine Chronology	14 besides Shehadeh, including 9 children and 4 women	140 [2]
Al Mezan report	15 besides Shehadeh, including his aide	145 [1]
Al Jazeera Encyclopedia	12 besides Shehadeh, including his wife and one daughter	Over 140 [4]
Al Mezan’s first statement (23 July)	11 documented by name, 8 of them children	At least 73 [3]

A war crime

The occupation’s statements were at first unapologetic; later they expressed regret for the civilian deaths and blamed “faulty intelligence.” [1] But dropping a one-ton bomb on a crowded residential neighbourhood at midnight cannot be a mistake.

Al Mezan condemned the bombing as a war crime, called on the international community to intervene, and said that “silence in the face of such on-going crimes is akin to complicity.” [3] Read about the occupation’s later crimes in the genocidal

war on Gaza.

Conclusion

In a single night the one-ton bomb killed fifteen Palestinians in al-Daraj, more than half of them children, the youngest a two-month-old baby girl. The massacre was an early sign of the occupation’s readiness to kill families in their homes as the price of assassinating one man.

Frequently asked questions about the al-Daraj massacre

When did the al-Daraj massacre take place?

Shortly before midnight on 22 July 2002.

How many people were killed in the al-Daraj massacre?

15 besides Salah Shehadeh, 9 of them children, and about 140 wounded.

What weapon was used?

A one-ton bomb dropped by two F-16 warplanes.

Who was the target?

Salah Shehadeh, commander-in-chief of the Qassam Brigades; his wife, one of his daughters and his aide were killed with him.

Who was the youngest victim?

Two-month-old Dina Rami Matar.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, “A Report Concerning the Israeli Bombardment of the Daraj District of Gaza City on 22 July 2002”.
2. “Monday, July 22, 2002,” Palestine Chronology, Institute for Palestine Studies.
3. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, press release 57/2002 on the bombing of al-Daraj, 23 July 2002.
4. “Salah Shehadeh: Founder of the First Core of the Qassam Brigades,” Al Jazeera Encyclopedia.