

Israel's 60th Independence Day (UPDATED)

Contributed by Yvonne Ridley
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Article updated with the missing paragraphs

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And I wonder which children they are honouring ... the ones slaughtered by the brutal Zionist army?

In the last 18 months, more than 120 have been slaughtered ... all Palestinian children. One fifth of the dead were children and teenagers - an unprecedented number even by Israel's standards.

These children were gunned down as they studied for exams, climbed fig trees, sat and played in the streets.

Yes, some of them may have thrown a stone at an armoured car or tank, or touched a forbidden fence. And this is how one of the largest armies in the world reacts.

I want to tell you about some of these children.

Let's start with 14-year-old Dam Hamad, from Rafah who was killed in her sleep, in her mother's arms by an Israeli rocket strike. She was the only daughter of her paralyzed mother.

Then I want you to consider the case of Mohamed al-Zakh who is known as the boy from Gaza who was buried twice.

He was 14 when he died three days before the start of his school year - his fragile body blown apart in Operation Locked Kindergarten ... yes, that was the name of the military strike. Five children died in that operation.

His broken father identified the child's torso and legs from his clothes and his remains were buried. Then the bereaved father found the remaining parts of his body some days later after the Israeli Army left the area. Another burial had to be held.

Israeli forces also fired a missile that hit the minibus transporting children to the Indira Gandhi kindergarten in Gaza. Two children were killed on the spot. The teacher, Najwa Khalif, died a few days later. She was wounded in clear view of her 20 small pupils, who were sitting in the minibus. After her death, the children drew a picture: a row of children lying bleeding, their teacher in the front, and an Israeli plane bombing them.

Gaza schoolboy Ayman al-Mahdi, died after a bullet fired from a tank hit him. The ten year old had been sitting with friends on a bench on a street in Jabalya, right by his school. Children in the West Bank, are targets too. Jamil Jabaji, a child from the new Askar refugee camp, was shot in the head. He was 14 when. He and his friends were throwing rocks at the armored vehicle that passed by the camp, located near Nablus. The driver provoked the children, slowing down and speeding up, slowing down and speeding up, until finally a soldier got out, aimed at the boy's head and fired.

And what did 16-year-old Taha al-Jawi do to get himself killed? The Israeli soldier said he tried to sabotage the barbed-wire fence surrounding the abandoned Atarot airport; his friends said he was just playing soccer and had gone to chase after the ball. Live fire directed at unarmed children who weren't endangering anyone, with no prior warning.

Abir Aramin was even younger; she was just 11. The daughter of an activist in the Combatants for Peace organization, in

January she left her school in Anata and was on the way to buy candy in a little shop. She was fired upon from a Border Police vehicle.

In Nablus, a Jewish human rights group documented the use of children as human shields - the use of the so-called "neighbor procedure" - involving an 11-year-old girl, a 12-year-old boy and a 15-year-old boy. This practice has been outlawed by the High Court of Justice. Do the law courts in Israel not recognise the rights of Palestinian children?

The same Jewish human rights group - and it is important to remember not all Israelis agree with the brutality of the Israeli Army - recorded the story of the death of baby Khaled, whose parents, Sana and Daoud Fakih, tried to rush him to the hospital in the middle of the night, a time when Palestinian babies apparently mustn't get sick: The baby died at the checkpoint.

In Kafr al-Shuhada (the "martyrs' village") south of Jenin, in March, 15-year-old Ahmed Asasa was fleeing from soldiers who had entered the village. A sniper's bullet caught him in the neck.

Bushra Bargis hadn't even left her home. In late April she was studying for a big test, notebooks in hand, pacing around her room in the Jenin refugee camp in the early evening, when a sniper shot her in the forehead from quite far away. Her bloodstained notebooks bore witness to her final moments.

And what about the unborn babies? They aren't safe either. A bullet in the back of Maha Qatuni, a woman who was seven months pregnant and got up during the night to protect her children in their home, struck her foetus in the womb, shattering its head. The wounded mother lay in a Hospital in Nablus, hooked up to numerous tubes. She was going to name the baby Daoud. Does killing a fetus count as murder? And how "old" was the deceased? He was certainly the youngest of the many children Israel killed in the past year.

God knows what the next year will bring - the year of the children.

But the blood of the young ones isn't just on the hands of the cowardly Israeli soldiers who deliberately target unarmed children. The blood is on the hands of the Israeli Government, the Bush Administration which turns a blind eye to the killing of innocents and on the weak members of the British Government who also look away silently. And in particular, that self-serving, vain pipsqueak, Foreign Secretary David Milliband, who trampled over the dead babies of Gaza to stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel as it unleashed its vast army on the people of Gaza. He said he could fully understand Israel's security concerns and called on Palestinian faction to stop their attacks against innocent civilians. And what would Milliband call Amira Khaled Abu Aser? She was barely a month old when she was buried in Gaza City on March 5 this year.

Did he have any words of comfort for the families of the six women and 30 children killed by Israel bombs and bullets since February 28 of this year? Milliband is a gutless, little weasel who lost more than his foreskin when he was circumcised