

Israeli Army Summarily Executed Fleeing Civilians In Southern Gaza

By [Charlotte Silver](#)

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Even before a short-lived ceasefire allowed [journalists to enter](#) the besieged southern Gaza strip town of Khuzaa on 1 August, desperate reports of an Israeli massacre — including execution-style shootings — had [emerged](#) from survivors who had escaped to nearby Khan Younis.

Once journalists were able to enter the choked-off village, they found slain [bodies](#) and the [stench of decay](#). Journalist Jesse Rosenfeld [described](#) one scene, among several, that appeared to be the site of a summary execution:

Blood and blackened remnants are caked on the bathroom floor. The walls have been drenched in blood and they are pocked with scores of bullet holes that look as if they were fired from an automatic weapon at waist level. Some of the bullet holes are in line, as if the gun were sweeping across its targets. There is also soot staining the tiles, suggesting the bodies were burned or there had been a small blast. Several tiles have fallen away from the wall. The house is filled with casings from the bullets used in assault rifles. They are marked on the bottom as “IMI” (Israel Military Industries)



People recovering the last body from the room where villagers say the mass execution has taken place. Lazar Simeonov for The Daily Beast ()

Fifty-one bodies were recovered on 1 August.

Deliberately firing on civilians

On Saturday, Ali Abunimah reported on a video apparently made by Israeli soldiers from the

Givati brigade on 30 July, recording their dedication of the destruction of a mosque in Khuzaa to fallen Israeli soldiers.

Now, after conducting its own investigations into the events between 23 and 25 July, Human Rights Watch has accused the Israeli army of deliberately firing on and killing civilians in the southern Gaza town of Khuzaa, violating several laws of war.

After interviewing surviving witnesses in Khan Younis, Human Rights Watch was able to chronicle the war crimes committed by the Israeli army. Such crimes include firing on civilians carrying white flags in an attempt to flee the village; shooting at medical workers attending to a mortally wounded Red Crescent paramedic volunteer; denying medical care to Palestinians in Israeli custody; and shooting at civilians after they were ordered to exit their homes.

This is not the first time such crimes have been committed in Khuzaa. As both Human Rights Watch and the Goldstone Report documented, during Israel's 2008-2009 offensive on Gaza Israeli soldiers shot at several Palestinians in Khuzaa carrying white flags, killing at least one and injuring more.

“Large craters”

Khuzaa has a population of around 10,000 and lies between Khan Younis and Gaza's eastern boundary with Israel. Employees of Human Rights Watch have yet to be able to enter Khuzaa, saying that all four roads leading to the town have been replaced by “large bomb craters.”

For weeks, Khuzaa was completely isolated from ambulance services and much of the media as Israeli forces fired on its residents by air and ground assault.

The one exception was on 24 July, when the Israeli military allowed the Red Cross to enter Khuzaa for just one hour to retrieve the injured and collect dead bodies. The next day, on 25 July, Israeli forces granted a request submitted by the International Committee of the Red Cross to permit the Palestine Red Crescent Society to do the same.

But still, the Red Crescent was unable to reach many families. Furthermore, as reported by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Israel attacked a volunteer with the Red Crescent while he was attempted to treat the wounded. Paramedics tried to rush him to a hospital, but were also targeted by Israel. The volunteer died.

Unable to escape

Human Rights Watch reports that Israel gave advanced warnings to the residents of Khuzaa prior to 21 July, but notes that civilians' failure to evacuate an area that has been given an advanced warning does not make them lawful targets.

Instead, as the investigation makes clear, Israel deliberately shot at Palestinians as they tried to flee their homes and village.

In one incident described by Human Rights Watch that took place on 25 July, an Israeli airstrike shelled a home that was sheltering 120 people in its basement, killing three civilians: five-year-old Motassem al-Najjar, 70-year-old Salim Qdeih, and 62-year-old Kamel

al-Najjar. Fifteen were injured.

When the survivors of the strike tried to flee, carrying white flags over their heads, another Israeli missile struck the group, killing one man and injuring another.

While many towns located on the eastern border with Israel fled following Israel's ground assault on 18 July, residents of Khuzaa were unable to escape. Speaking from Khan Younis, Akram al-Najjar, 15, told Human Rights Watch that Israel began shelling the village on 18 July, and his family ran "from house to house seeking shelter."

Al-Najjar added that he and about 100 others had gathered in one house on 23 July. Once the Israelis found them and ordered them to leave, al-Najjar said: "The first one to walk out of the house was Shahid al-Najjar. He had his hands up, but the soldiers shot him. He was shot in the jaw and badly injured, but he survived."

The army then ordered the rest of the men to take off their clothes before exiting the house. Everyone was then separated by age and gender; women and boys under 14 were ordered to leave the village by foot, while the men were shuffled between houses after putting on their clothes.



Palestinians walk past houses destroyed by Israeli airstrikes and shelling in Khuzaa, 3 August. ([Ramadan El-Agha](#) / [APA images](#))

"He was shot"

Akram al-Najjar was put in a group with boys ages 14 to 19. He reported: "We had walked from the dunes and had reached the mosque. We got 50 meters past it, and soldiers started shooting at us. The shooting injured three of us. One of them died. He was shot in the stomach."

According to Akram's grandfather, 75-year-old Mohammad al-Najjar, Israel detained all the

men between the ages of 16 and 50 and “let the rest of us go.” He believes that his three sons are still in Israeli custody, along with hundreds of others that have been detained in Gaza.

The full Human Rights Watch report documents several of the laws of war Israel violated in Khuzaa — yet still only a partial picture of what occurred in Khuzaa is illuminated.

In the report, Human Rights Watch urges the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas to seek International Criminal Court jurisdiction over crimes committed on and from Palestinian territory as a means to achieve accountability and deter war crimes.

Charlotte Silver is an independent journalist in San Francisco, formerly based in the West Bank. She tweets [@CharESilver](#)

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