

Israel's Crimes against The Children of Palestine: "I'm Just a Kid", Tariq Kdeir's Ordeal

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Last summer, Tariq Khdeir, a 15-year-old American citizen from Baltimore, accompanied his parents to the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Shuafat for a six-week visit with relatives. The first friend Tariq made when he arrived was his cousin, Muhammad Abu Khdeir, whom Tariq had not seen since he was four years old. "We had so much fun," Tariq told a gathering at the national conference of the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation in San Diego on September 19, 2014.

One night while he was in Jerusalem, Tariq saw some police with Muhammad. Tariq thought they had kidnapped Muhammad. Tariq wondered, "Is he gonna come back? Is he gonna come back alive"? But Muhammad did not come back alive. In retaliation for the deaths of three Israeli teenagers, Muhammad was beaten and burnt alive by three Jewish extremists.

After Muhammad's murder, people took to the streets in protest. Israeli Defense Force soldiers began firing rubber bullets at them. Incredulous, Tariq thought, "Is this really happening in front of me"? Then Israeli soldiers began to run after Tariq. Panicked, Tariq ran.

"There was a 10-foot drop in front of me. Everyone jumped, but they tackled me, zip-tied me, and punched me in the face," Tariq said. "I was like a punching bag until I became unconscious." The image of Tariq's badly swollen, deformed face appeared on media reports throughout the world last July.

When Tariq awoke, his face felt "like a bubble, it hurt so much." He wondered, "Are they gonna kill me"? After six hours in jail, Tariq was finally taken to the hospital. His father and his uncle told him he might come home or go to jail. Tariq thought, "How could I go to jail? They beat me up." Tariq told the group, "I'm just a kid."

Tariq was taken back to jail after he left the hospital. He had to remove the hospital gown and put on his bloody clothes. There were nine people in a tiny cell; it was impossible to sit down. Two days later, Tariq was released. He thought, "I'm finally going home." But he was placed on house arrest. No charges were ever filed against him. "That's what they do to all the Palestinians," Tariq said.

"They took my cousins, and they're still in jail, because they're not American and they didn't have a video that showed the brutality of the Israelis," Tariq reported. "It's inhumane."

Tariq's mother, Suha, said, "I cannot begin to describe the pain of seeing my dear son in prison after his viscous beating." When she first saw Tariq, unconscious, with his swollen

face in the hospital, “I didn’t recognize him; I didn’t know if he was alive. I didn’t know if he would survive.” Tariq was handcuffed to the hospital bed. Suha worried whether they would give him his antibiotics, whether they would take care of her son while he was in their custody. “The same people that beat him were now caring for him,” she said. “They told us 300 Palestinian teenagers would be killed for the three Israeli teens.”

Suha noted, “None of this would have happened if Israelis valued the lives of Palestinian Muslims and Christians as much as Israeli Jews.”

Keynote speaker Ali Abunimah followed Tariq and Suha at the conference. He mentioned that of the more than 2,100 Palestinians the Israelis killed in Gaza last summer, 521 were children. Most of the fatalities were civilians. More than one of every 1,000 Gazans were killed, and one percent of the entire population of Gaza were killed or injured.

Most of the weapons the Israelis employed in Gaza were artillery shells, which were used in unprecedented quantities. They are very inaccurate.

In response to Israeli demands that the Palestinians surrender their weapons, Abunimah asked, “Why talk about demilitarizing the oppressed? Let’s talk about demilitarizing the oppressor.”

After Mummahad was killed, the Israelis called it an “honor killing.” Muhammad’s father said, “they’ve killed my son twice.”

Two hundred Palestinian children are still in jail. Abunimah cited the “racist mentality” of many Israelis who chant, “Death to the Arabs.” Abunimah recalled President Barack Obama’s remark about “the shared values of the United States and Israel.”

Do those shared values include slaughtering civilians, torturing children, and holding people in custody indefinitely without charges?

Tariq did come back alive – but only because his beating was caught on tape and because he was a U.S. citizen.

***Marjorie Cohn** is a professor at Thomas Jefferson and a former president of the National Lawyers Guild. She spoke at the conference about free speech, material support, boycott, and divestment issues on a panel titled, “Confronting Challenges to Palestine Activism.” Her new book, “Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral and Geopolitical Issues,” will be published in October.*

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