

Palestine: Even During a Pandemic, Israeli Soldiers Shoot Holes in Water Tanks at Kafr Qadum

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In recent weeks, soldiers have repeatedly shot holes in water tanks on the roofs of homes in Kafr Qadum. The shooting takes place during the weekly protests against the closure of the eastern exit from the village, which connects the village to the city of Nablus and passes through the expansion of the settlement of Kedumim. The residents have been holding the weekly protests since 2011.

As a result of Israel's policy, Palestinians in the West Bank suffer severe water shortages and an irregular supply. To alleviate the hardship, residents place water tanks with volumes of 500 or 1,000 liters on their roofs to stock water during supply hours, for use during the many hours when there is no running water.

B'Tselem's investigation indicates that the shooting is deliberate and has resulted in residents losing hundreds of liters of water. They will now have to purchase expensive new tanks at about 500 NIS (~125 USD) per unit. Since the beginning of April, soldiers have damaged 24 water tanks on rooftops of homes in the village, some more than once. In some homes, water tanks were damaged three or four times over a month and a half.

The damage to the water tanks is sheer abuse and constitutes an illegal act of collective punishment. As residents now have to follow strict hygienic measures, including frequent handwashing, due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, this conduct is even graver. Nevertheless, the shootings have continued unabated for several weeks. This indicates that rather than the random initiative of a particular soldier, this conduct that is at least condoned by the commanders on the ground, in blatant disregard for residents' lives and property.

The testimonies were given to B'Tselem field researcher Abdulkarim Sadi.

Home of 'Assem and Nuha 'Aqel

On Saturday, 25 April 2020, around 1:30 P.M., about an hour after the weekly demonstration began, soldiers opened fire at the water tanks on the roof of 'Assem (42) and Nuha (43) 'Aqel's home, where the couple live with their five children and his brothers' family. When the demonstration was over, 'Assem went up to the roof and temporarily fixed a bullet hole in a water tank.

In a testimony he gave the next day, he recounted:

During the protest and the clashes with the soldiers, who were waiting for the protestors, I was at home with my wife and sons. Every now and then we heard live fire and the sound of “rubber” bullets and tear-gas canisters being shot. Meanwhile, I also heard shooting coming from the hill behind our house, about 200 meters away. After a few moments, I heard water flowing from the roof into the courtyard through the drainpipes. Since the soldiers were still up on the hill, I was scared to go up to the roof. I only closed the main water faucet, so the tanks wouldn’t fill up.

I waited for about an hour until the demonstration was over. When I was sure the soldiers were gone, I went up to the roof. I saw a hole in the plastic tank and temporarily fixed it by putting in a screw and adding adhesive material around it to seal the hole, but it’s still leaking. We lost about 450 liters of water. Last year, the Israeli military also shot at our water tank and we were forced to replace it.

Now, because of the coronavirus, we have to be especially careful about cleanliness. We have to shower, wash our clothes and wash our hands more often. It’s also the water we use for cooking and drinking. I don’t understand how the soldiers can be so heartless and damage water tanks like that. Water is the main source of life for every human being.

Because of the coronavirus, it’s now harder to travel between the villages. In any case, the stores selling plastic tanks in the neighboring villages are closed. The repair I made is only temporary. I’ll have to buy a new water tank and the cost of buying and assembling it is 500 shekels.

Home of the extended Shteivi family

Since the beginning of April, soldiers have fired at water tanks of the extended Shteivi family three times. The tanks are used by three apartments in a three-story building – the apartments of ‘Awni Shteivi (38), his wife Ruwaa (31) and their four children; the apartment of his brother Mu’in (45), his wife Nahil (36) and their two children; and the apartment of ‘Awni’s mother Nazikah (67) and aunt ‘Ablah (65).

In a testimony ‘Awni Shteivi gave on 3 May 2020, he recounted:

The first time the soldiers fired at our water tanks was Friday, 10 April 2020, at around 2:00 P.M. My mother’s water tank and ours were hit by two bullets each, and my brother Mu’ins’ water tank was hit by one bullet. The water leaked from the three tanks, through the drainpipes into the courtyard and then to the road by the house. I went out and closed the tanks’ faucets so the water would stop running. I waited until the protest was over and only then went up to the roof. I think the shooting came from the top of the hill called Jabal al-Aqra’ , which lies about 100 meters from our house. Usually, during the protests, about 10 or 15 soldiers stand there. I consulted my brother and we decided not to buy new water tanks but to fix the ones we have temporarily with screws and adhesive material. Three new water tanks would cost us 1,500 shekels (~ 430 USD).

Two weeks later, on Friday, 24 April 2020, soldiers fired at the water tanks again. The water flowed through the drainpipes into the courtyard. My sons went out and closed the main faucet. This time, my brother and I decided to make a temporary fix to keep the water from leaking. A week later, on Saturday, 2 May 2020, it happened again. This time, I closed the faucets before the demonstration began, to avoid losing any more water. Again, we sealed the holes with screws and adhesives.

The repairs we made are only temporary and won't last long. These water tanks were hit three times. Some of them have five or six bullet holes. We'll have to replace them, but there's no point in doing it now. We'll wait for the soldiers to stop shooting at them. In the houses next to us, many of the tanks were also hit by bullets fired by soldiers from the hill.

We use the water in the tanks on a daily basis - for drinking, cooking, laundry, bathing, and cleaning in general. Shooting at them is immoral and inhuman. Maybe the soldiers think it will make the weekly protests stop, but if that's the case, they're mistaken and delusional. Even if they keep this up, we'll just fix what they damaged. We will never give up or surrender.

Home of Ashraf and Athnaa Shteivi

The water tank on the rooftop of Ashraf Shteivi, a 44-year-old police officer, his wife Athnaa and their children, has been punctured three times since the beginning of April.

In a testimony he gave on 26 April 2020, Shteivi recounted:

On Friday, 24 April 2020, the first day of Ramadan, I finished praying at the mosque and return home. Shortly after the demonstration began, clashes developed between the protestors and the soldiers, and we heard the noise of stun grenades and the shooting of live fire and "rubber" bullets.

About an hour later, we heard water flowing through the drainpipes. The courtyard filled with water. Then a bullet shattered the kitchen window. There's a hill right in front of the window where soldiers stand , so I was sure they'd fired at the house from there.

Image on the right: The smashed window in the Shteivi family home. Photo courtesy of



the family

My wife and little kids got scared. I put them in the living room to keep them out of the range of fire. I went outside and closed the main faucet, so we wouldn't lose a lot of water. Since our house is right in front of the hill, I waited until the clashes were over. Only then, I went up to the roof to check the damage to the tank and tried to fix it with screws.

It was the third time this month that soldiers fired at our water tanks. Every

time, we lost a lot of water and I put screws in the bullet holes. The next day, it happened for the fourth time. It was late afternoon. The soldiers on top of the hill fired two bullets at the water tank and it drained out completely.

Firing at the water tanks is collective punishment and destruction of our property by the Israeli soldiers because of the weekly demonstrations. I cannot pay 500 shekels every time they shoot at a water tank. So, every time they start shooting, I close the main faucet and temporarily fix the tank with screws and glue.

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