

War Crimes in Khuza'a, Gaza: Israel Used Palestinian Civilians as Human Shields

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Global Research, August 15, 2014

[Mondoweiss](#) 14 August 2014

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

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Israeli soldiers check their weapons on the southern border with the Gaza Strip. (Photo: Agence France-Presse/Getty Images)

Earlier this month, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [reportedly asked the U.S. for help in combatting charges of war crimes](#) committed over the last month in Gaza. He will definitely need it.

In recent days, well-documented accounts of war crimes have poured out of the Gaza Strip from journalists and human rights advocates. Some of these stories will likely be followed up on by the [United Nations team that has been tasked](#) with investigating war crimes in the Gaza Strip.

Many of these accounts have focused on Khuza'a, a village near Khan Younis that was the site of intensive Israeli bombardment in late July. Khuza'a is near Gaza's border with Israel, and Israeli forces battled Palestinian fighters there. By many [accounts](#) from Palestinians and journalists, the village suffered from indiscriminate shelling and firing, leading to the deaths of many Palestinian civilians. There are also reports that Israeli soldiers shot unarmed civilians at point-blank range. (*Mondoweiss* printed accounts from Palestinians on the apparent massacre in Khuza'a [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).)

[Daily Beast's reporter Jesse Rosenfeld was among the first](#) to document with his own eyes what look like blatant war crimes in the village. On August 1, he published a harrowing account of a mass execution in the village. What was left in the village, Rosenfeld wrote, is "rubble, bombed-out buildings and the all-encompassing, sickening smell of death." Rosenfeld broke the story of how there were at least six rotting, dead bodies piled together in a small home. He's careful not to assign blame, but he does report that "the house is filled with casings from the bullets used in assault rifles. They are marked on the bottom as 'IMI' (Israel Military Industries)."

Human Rights Watch [added their own report three days later](#). The human rights organization said that Israeli soldiers shot and killed civilians who were fleeing Khuza'a, which is a blatant violation of international law. On July 23, for instance, Israeli soldiers ordered about 100 Palestinians to leave a residence they had gathered in for shelter. When Shahid al-Najjar left the residence, he was shot in the jaw by an Israeli soldier. Then, [Human Rights Watch reported](#), soldiers detained all of the males over the age of 15. They brought some of the detainees into Israel for interrogation. The Israeli forces let some of them go, but fired on one unarmed group while they were walking to Khan Younis, killing one Palestinian and wounding two others.

But perhaps the most disturbing documentation of war crimes was published by the Euro-Mid Observer for Human Rights. (*The Electronic Intifada's* Rania Khalek [covered the report here](#).) In Euro-Mid's August 10th release, the group relayed Palestinian accounts of being used as human shields—a particularly important charge given that Israeli officials have repeatedly accused Hamas of using civilians as human shields with no evidence.

Ramadan Muhammad Qadeeh said that on July 25th, Israeli soldiers raided his home in the village. They killed his 65-year-old father at point-blank range after he tried to tell the soldiers they were just civilians. Then, Qadeeh said, "they ordered us to take off our clothes and tied our hands up. They took us to one of the rooms and used us as shields, making us stand at the windows as if we were looking outside...I was at one window and three children from my family at another. The soldiers then began firing around us." There are [many detailed accounts](#) of how Israel has used Palestinian civilians as human shields during past military operations in Gaza.

The Palestinian journalist Mohammed Omer also [reported on apparent war crimes in Khuza'a for the Middle East Eye](#). Omer wrote on how the Qudeh family was sheltering in their home on July 25 when an Israeli army-operated bulldozer crashed into the home and then soldiers entered the residence. 64-year-old Mohammed Tawfiq Qudeh went to talk with the soldiers while waving a white flag. But as witnesses told Omer, an Israeli soldier shot and killed him.

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