

A Disabled Palestinian Was Carrying a Bag of Lollipops When He Was Shot by Israeli Troops

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Israeli soldiers shot and wounded a man with special needs near Hebron, at close range, for no apparent reason. When his brother came to his aid, he was handcuffed and kicked. A few weeks earlier, another man with disabilities was shot dead nearby



Tariq Abu 'Abed being helped by his mother, Sumia, and his brother, Ziaa, this week. When Ziaa tried to tell the soldiers that Tariq is disabled, they said : « If your brother is crazy, tell your mother and father to shut him in the house and not let him go out. »Credit : Alex Levac

First there's the shocking video. A heavysset man with a cumbersome gait walks slowly toward two Israel Defense Forces soldiers. The iron gate at the checkpoint is behind him, shared taxis waiting for passengers are parked at the side of the road, he's holding a plastic bag. From his peculiar walk, with his body swaying from side to side, it's quite clear that he is a person with special needs. Not a moment passes before the soldiers shoot him in the leg at close range, without warning, for no apparent reason. The man collapses to the ground, goes into spasms, is writhing in pain and screaming and bellowing like a wounded animal. The two soldiers continue to train their weapons on him. He rolls around on the road, terrified and in agony. The person who shot the footage, most likely from a nearby building, is overheard saying, « It's Tariq the Azawi [the Gazan]. »

Tariq the Gazan is Tariq Abu 'Abed, a 34-year-old man whose family is originally from Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip. Tariq roamed the streets of Hebron every day trying to sell lollipops he kept in a jar for a few pennies each. The plastic bag he held that day, Tuesday, December 5, contained the lollipops he hadn't sold. It was late afternoon, he was on his way home ; the checkpoint was at the entrance to Khirbet Qalqas, a neighborhood in southern Hebron, bordering the city of Yatta.

Here's another photo, taken at the checkpoint shortly afterward : A young man is lying on his stomach, both hands bound behind his back, his legs spread, a soldier standing above him and aiming his rifle at him. The man is Tariq's brother, Ziaa, 32, a construction worker employed in Israel, who tried to come to the aid of his wounded sibling. The soldiers hit him, Ziaa relates now.

They ordered him to lie on the ground, shackled his hands and kicked him in the back.

In his ponderous way, Tariq tells us that before shooting him, the soldiers had struck him too. They demanded to see his ID card, whereupon he told them that it was at home and that he passed by every day like this, on the way to work and back. The two soldiers became angry and struck Tariq, who tried to keep walking. Unable to stop him, they shot him with seemingly no hesitation.

Video. Footage of the shooting.

It's safe to say that they knew he was a person with a mental condition from his behavior and manner of speaking ; it's hard to mistake his disability. In the video clip the bystanders don't appear to be especially upset at the sight of this helpless person writhing in pain on the ground. Most of them go about their business unperturbed ; it seems that this is routine for them. Only one tries to approach Tariq.

It turns out that you don't have to be [an Israel Defense Forces soldier in the Gaza Strip](#) in order to shoot helpless people. It's just as easy in the West Bank. Just over a month before this incident, Israeli soldiers shot to death another young man with special needs, Fouad Abu Sabha, 22, at the checkpoint at the northern entrance to Yatta, just a few kilometers from where Tariq was shot. Under the cover of the atrocities being perpetuated in Gaza, no one was unduly disturbed by that incident, either.

Since [the war](#) broke out in early October, life in and around Hebron and Yatta, two of the largest cities in the West Bank, has become particularly difficult. Yatta, with a population of over 100,000, is closed off to vehicular traffic from almost every side. Using iron gates and boulders, the army has blocked all the entrances and exits other than those on the city's eastern side. We visited Yatta this week accompanied by Nasser Nawaj'ah, the South Hebron Hills field researcher for the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, whom we met at his home in Susya. Also in that village, all the entrance and exits have been blocked with boulders.

Driving to Yatta, we negotiated a narrow, difficult mountain road, which twisted and turned and stretched on and on. On the way back we looked for a different route. We drove around the city for some time until we found a barrier where one of the boulders had somehow been moved, creating a space about the width of a medium-sized car through which we were able to eke our way out.

There were fewer cars than usual in Yatta this week. The week before, the IDF had conducted an operation to impound cars without a license plate - called *mashtubot*, slang for « erased vehicles » - across the West Bank. That had netted about 1,500 vehicles, at least 100 of them in Yatta, where the troops also arrived at the local government hospital and seized cars belonging to patients and visitors.

There are a huge number of *mashtubot* in Yatta, cars sold for scrap in Israel which are then sold cheaply to residents of the West Bank. Because there is no public transportation in the city, the Palestinian Authority turns a blind eye to the illegal vehicles, in contrast to other cities, such as Hebron, where it impounds them. Now the Israeli security establishment, which is known for its sincere and devoted concern for the safety and well-being of the local inhabitants, has seized hundreds of cars in the territories that anyway were only used within the confines of villages and cities. Just one more punitive measure among the many inflicted on Palestinians since the war began.

The home of Tariq the Gazan is at the edge of Qalqas. Signs of severe distress and dire economic and social straits emanate from this building. Garbage is strewn at the entrance, flies buzz around

inside.

Tariq's mother, Sumia, a 52-year-old divorcee who cleans homes in Hebron for a living, lives in one room in the cramped ground-floor apartment ; his brother Samar, 21, his pregnant wife and their son live in another room ; and the third room is occupied by Tariq, his wife Ayat, and their two young children - the youngest one, Maryam, was born earlier this month in the Abu Hasan Al Qassem Governmental Hospital, while Tariq was recuperating in a room on the floor below. Tariq's brother Ziaa lives with his wife and their four children in an apartment on the upper floor of the building.

Tariq Abu 'Abed with his mother, Sumia.Credit : Alex Levac

The young children of the extended family scamper through the small living room, barefoot and half-naked, munching on cheap snacks and the lollipops that Tariq sells, which may on some days be their only food : Since the war broke out, Ziaa, the family's chief provider, has been unable to enter Israel - like all the inhabitants of the West Bank - and the economic crunch has become even more acute.

The family moved here 23 years ago from Gaza, in the wake of family feuds. Sumia has two sisters in Khan Yunis, and the four half-brothers and half-sisters of Tariq and Ziaa also live there with their families. With the exception of one of Sumia's sisters, Ibtisam, who accompanied her son for cancer treatments at a Hebron hospital a few years ago, they haven't met anyone from Khan Yunis since they left. Tariq and Ziaa's father, Ahmed, lives elsewhere in Hebron, and the family is apparently not in touch with him either. It is Ahmed's children from his second marriage and their families who are now, as war rages, either alive or dead in Gaza.

Tariq is brought into the room, wearing a tattered brown galabiya. He's aided by a walker but can barely move, putting his weight only on the left foot ; the right leg, shattered by bullets, has a brace on it. It's a huge effort for him to sit down. His mother brings him a filthy plastic pail to serve as a footrest, but finally he rests the leg on the walker.

Chewing gum, Tariq looks around apathetically at the scene around him. He isn't able to say how old he is, when asked, but answers other questions. He shouts when speaking, as does his mother, and the house resounds with noise. Occasionally Ziaa swats one of the little children. He also tries to keep his mother from talking, but she ignores him. Not exactly a picture of domestic tranquility, the Abu 'Abed home.

Tariq's wife, Ayat, 27, sits in a corner, rocking the cradle of their son, 1-year-old Seif, who was born with a neurological condition and has an enlarged head. His mother stares vacantly at what's going on in the room but doesn't utter a sound. Two-week-old Maryam is wrapped up, mummy-like, in a blanket and lies on the sofa like a doll.

How are you ? Tariq replies that he's wounded. His mother uncovers his right hip, which is in a sling-like device. In 2019, the Palestinian Health Ministry decreed Tariq 100 percent disabled, because of his mental state. Tariq never attended school. Until the age of about 5 he was a very aggressive child. Every day he goes out to sell his lollipops, mostly just to get out of the house and have something to do. He says he doesn't make a profit. Ziaa, he adds, is calmer than he is, but still jittery. Until the war Ziaa worked in Israeli locales including Harish, Hod Hasharon, Tel Aviv and Taibeh.



The road block at the entrance to Khirbet Qalqas. Credit : Alex Levac

Tariq would leave the house at 7 every morning, usually taking a shared taxi to the center of Hebron, but in some cases drivers refuse to let him into the car, he says, because he doesn't stop talking. In that case he walks two hours to the city center. On December 5, his mother joined him for the trip - she went to clean homes - as did 9-year-old Ahmed, Tariq's nephew, who also sold candies. In the center of Hebron they split up : Ahmed went to the market, Sumia to her cleaning jobs and Tariq proceeded to the Ein Sara neighborhood, where he sells his wares next to traffic lights.

At midday, an acquaintance of Sumia sent her a clip that was being shared widely on social media, showing soldiers beating Tariq. Sumia could not bring herself to watch. The footage was shot close to the gate at the entrance to Qalqas, which has been closed to cars since the beginning of the war. Eyewitnesses related to the family that after Tariq told the soldiers that his ID card was at home, a tall, thin soldier called him a liar and started to beat him, while a second soldier aimed his rifle at him.

When Ziaa, who was home at the time, learned that Tariq had been shot, he rushed to the checkpoint, a few kilometers away. When he got there, the soldiers ordered him to halt. He tried to explain to them that his brother was lying on the ground and that he was mentally disabled. Ziaa says he was certain that Tariq was dead.

The soldiers fired into the air to frighten Ziaa, ordered him to lie on the ground and forcefully handcuffed his hands behind his back. They kicked him a number of times, he adds. One soldier rammed his foot under Ziaa's chin. He asked them to send a soldier who could speak Arabic. They told him to shut up. He lay like that for half an hour. Finally an Arabic-speaking officer arrived. Ziaa tried to explain that his brother was mentally disabled, to which the officer replied, according to Ziaa : « If your brother is crazy, tell your mother and your father to shut him in the house and not let him go out. »

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit stated, in reply to a query from Haaretz : "The existing preliminary information indicates that during a security check that took place adjacent to Hebron on December 5, the Palestinian was shot in the leg and was evacuated to receive medical treatment. Upon receipt of the report, an investigation was launched by the Military Police.

« As for the second case [i.e., Abu Sabha], dozens of suspects threw stones on October 30, 2023, at vehicles on Highway 317, near the Zief Junction, located in the territory of the Yehuda Brigade. A force was rushed to the site and dispersed the suspects. At a certain stage, a Palestinian threw stones at a military position, the force responded with gunfire, and a hit was observed. The Military Police have launched an investigation. »

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P.-S.

• Haaretz. Dec 23, 2023 :

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/twilight-zone/2023-12-23/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/a-disabled-palestinian-was-carrying-a-bag-of-lollipops-when-he-was-shot-by-israeli-troops/0000018c-93d1-dfd0-a5af-fbf5d94e0000>