

# Palestinians in Israel's north 'abandoned' by authorities as rocket deaths soar

Thursday 28 November 2024, by [ARRAF Suha](#) (Date first published: 22 November 2024).

**Palestinian citizens are disproportionately bearing the brunt of Hezbollah's missiles due to their lack of shelters and proximity to Iron Dome batteries.**

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The scene where a missile fired by Hezbollah in Lebanon landed and caused damage in the Palestinian town of Majd Al-Krum, northern Israel, October 16, 2024. (Chaim Goldberg/Flash90)

The scene where a missile fired by Hezbollah in Lebanon landed and caused damage in the Palestinian town of Majd Al-Krum, northern Israel, October 16, 2024. (Chaim Goldberg/Flash90)

On Monday, Nov. 18, a missile launched by Hezbollah in Lebanon landed in the Palestinian city of Shefa-Amr in northern Israel. Safa Awad, a 50-year-old schoolteacher and mother of four, had taken shelter in her reinforced safe room after rocket sirens sounded in the community. But the missile evaded Israel's Iron Dome defense system and landed directly on Awad's house, killing her.

Awad joined a growing list of [at least 48](#) civilians killed in northern Israel by Hezbollah rockets, or falling shrapnel caused by their interception, since the war began in October 2023. Yet those casualties are not being borne equally: despite comprising only one-fifth of the state's population, Palestinians represent more than 58 percent of the victims, according to [figures published](#) this week by the NGO Sikkuy-Aufoq.

The casualty rate in northern Israel has increased sharply since the Israeli military launched its ground invasion into southern Lebanon on Oct. 1 of this year, with 19 killed in that period alone. Six of these casualties were Palestinians, alongside eight Israeli Jews and five foreign workers.

Awad's death in Shefa-Amr followed those of two other Palestinians in the same city on Oct. 31: a [mother and son](#) killed by shrapnel while harvesting olives on their land. A week earlier, [two young men](#) were killed and more than two dozen others wounded by a Hezbollah missile and shrapnel from Iron Dome interceptions in the town of Majd Al-Krum. And on Oct. 29, [one man](#) was killed when a rocket landed in the town of Tarshiha.

These recent deaths — as well as other severe injuries, such as a woman in the Arab city of Tamra who had to have her leg amputated after a missile hit her home on Oct. 27 — have intensified the sense among Palestinians in northern Israel that the authorities are abdicating their duty to protect them from Hezbollah's attacks.

*Palestinians at the site where a missile fired by Hezbollah in Lebanon landed and caused damage in the Palestinian town of Majd Al-Krum, northern Israel, October 25, 2024. (Michael Giladi/Flash90)*

There are two main levels to this neglect: first, residents point to a severe shortage of rocket shelters in Arab communities compared to nearby Jewish ones; and second, the army appears to be placing Iron Dome batteries next to Arab towns so that shrapnel from interceptions falls over them instead of over neighboring Jewish communities.

The extent of the state's disregard for the safety of its Palestinian citizens becomes evident when comparing the situation in neighboring Arab and Jewish communities. Hussein Manna, an attorney and chairman of the local parents' committee in the town of Majd Al-Krum, highlighted the stark difference between the situation in the Shaghur area, which comprises the Arab localities of Majd Al-Krum, Deir Al-Assad, and Bu'ana, and the situation in Karmiel, a predominantly Jewish city located 3.5 kilometers away.

"Karmiel has 126 public shelters and hundreds of small mobile shelters for 55,000 residents," he told +972. "The Shaghur area has a similar population: 53,000 people. In the entire area, there are two public shelters: one in Deir Al-Assad, and one in Bu'ana. The state took pity on us [in Majd Al-Krum] and gave us six mobile shelters, each 1.5 by 1.5 meters, which can accommodate 10-12 people. We need at least 50 such shelters, and they gave us six. We've been abandoned — our lives are cheap."

Another reason for the disproportionate number of fatalities among Palestinian citizens seems to have arisen from the way the army deploys Iron Dome batteries. "Majd Al-Krum is [considered] an 'open area,' so the army deliberately intercepts missiles above us, to protect the Jewish communities," Manna said. "It happens at least twice a week, causing damage to residents' homes and cars."

Mbada Farahat, a journalist with Radio Al-Nas who also lives in Majd Al-Krum, views the threat from falling Iron Dome interceptor missiles as greater than direct strikes by Hezbollah missiles. "Until [early October 2024], no shrapnel fell in Majd Al-Krum," he told +972. "They have since changed the location of the Iron Dome battery, and shrapnel has been falling on us. The local council sent a letter to the Home Front Command demanding that they move the battery or at least that the interceptions not occur over our heads."

This issue is not limited to Majd Al-Krum. Other Arab villages in the north have effectively become military bases, with residents telling +972 they often wake to the sound of a soldier shouting "One, two, three, launch!"

"Most of the Iron Dome interceptions occur over Arab villages and cities," Manna claimed. "It's the same in the Akka area, where shrapnel from an interception fell in [the Arab town of] Jadeidi-Makr, wounding many [Palestinians]. This is a discriminatory policy."

*Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system intercept rockets fired by Hezbollah in Lebanon over the Palestinian village of Jish, northern Israel, September 29, 2024. (David Cohen/Flash90)*

One local copywriter and graphic designer, Razi Najjar, captured the mood of the community with a [graphic](#) he posted on social media which quickly went viral. Crossing out all of the various names given to the Palestinians in Israel — from "Arab Israelis" to "48 Palestinians" — he replaced them with a new one: "Arabs of the open areas."

"Our lives don't matter," Manna continued. "They use us as human shields to protect [Jewish communities]. The lack of shelters and the [location of the] Iron Dome's interceptions are clear evidence of the government's policy that there should only be death and destruction among Arabs."

## **‘If they cared at all, they would do something’**

For Palestinians in northern Israel, this neglect is the latest in a long list of escalating injustices that they’ve experienced since the war began. Discrimination and racism are nothing new for Arab citizens, but October 7 brought with it an [unprecedented spike in persecution](#): from the [arrest of those expressing solidarity](#) with Gazans on social media, to [discriminatory firings](#) from workplaces and [expulsions from universities](#). A lack of protection from missiles, however, is costing them their lives.

In Majd Al-Krum, residents are feeling particularly exposed. “There’s a weapons and ammunition depot on the western side of the town, and to the north we have the Tefen Tower [industrial zone] with its military factories,” Manna explained. “Both of these locations are targets for Hezbollah, and we are in the middle.”

The problem of the lack of state-provided shelters is exacerbated by the fact that many residents do not have a safe room in their houses. “As soon as there’s a siren, people run to their stairwells,” Manna said. And while there are some shelters inside local schools, these can only accommodate around a third of the students. “Because of this, I insisted that our students learn remotely via Zoom, even though we received an order from the Home Front Command to bring the students back for in-person learning,” he added.

To deal with the shortage of shelters in public spaces, residents have had to use some of their own ingenuity. “The local council found a solution: using sewage pipes that belonged to a contractor in our city as mobile shelters,” Manna said. “At first, people laughed at the idea, but after a few direct missile strikes they found that they were actually effective.”

*Palestinians at the site where a missile fired by Hezbollah in Lebanon landed and caused damage in the Palestinian town of Majd Al-Krum, northern Israel, October 16, 2024. (Chaim Goldberg/Flash90)*

However, after the fatal missile strike on Oct. 25 that killed two residents in their town, Manna and Farahat, the journalist, got together with a group of young local activists and decided that they couldn’t sit idly by and wait for the state to do its job. “That same day, a group of us started corresponding over WhatsApp and thinking of immediate solutions,” Farahat told +972.

“We decided to start a fundraising campaign to buy mobile shelters and distribute them throughout the city, advertising it on social media,” he continued. “Someone from the city of Umm Al-Fahm who builds and sells these mobile shelters heard about our initiative and called us to say that he has three shelters that he is interested in donating to us because he understands how difficult the situation is. And the response from other people has also been amazing.”

While Farahat is proud of the residents’ resolve, he blames the government for making such initiatives a necessity. “After the [Oct. 25 strike], the National Security Ministry contacted the council and said it would provide protection as soon as possible, but it has done nothing. We cannot trust them. If they care about us at all, they would do something, just as they built shelters in Jewish communities.”

## **‘The village looks like an Israeli military base’**

In the village of Jish, close to the Lebanese border, residents are not only taking direct missile fire but also have to see and hear constant Israeli fire toward Lebanon. “The entire year was hard — whole nights we went without sleep,” Naheda Zuzu, a high school safety officer, told +972.

“The village looks like an Israeli military base,” she continued. “They put up checkpoints at the entrances, and a month ago they stationed a tank 200 meters away from my house and started firing shells non-stop. The noise was so loud that it affected my hearing. This situation is not normal; every day I open my eyes and thank God that I’m still alive. We had missiles fall nearby, luckily on farmland and not inside the village. Many windows were shattered by the force of the blasts. Even iron door frames cracked. Luckily there are shelters in the village.”

The situation has had a devastating effect on this year’s olive harvest in Arab villages in the north, where some families have risked their lives — and sometimes paid with them — to collect the fruit from their groves. “Less than 30 percent of residents harvested their olives this year,” Rommel Arraf, a young doctor from a village in the north, told +972.

“The village’s olive groves are divided into two areas: some within the village, and some on lands further away,” he explained. “If there’s a rocket siren when you’re in the nearby fields, you can run to the shelters or stairwells of nearby houses. But in the distant groves, there’s nowhere to hide from the missiles and shrapnel.”

*Palestinians at the site where a missile fired by Hezbollah in Lebanon landed and caused damage in the Palestinian town of Tarshiha, northern Israel, October 29, 2024. (Ayal Margolin/Flash90)*

According to Arraf, the constant Israeli shelling toward Lebanon harms the trees, and the deployment of military equipment near the groves makes them particularly vulnerable to falling shrapnel. “Every 5 minutes or so, the army fires three shells into Lebanon, causing olives to fall from the trees,” he said. “We waited for the situation to calm down, but it didn’t, and the harvest season is almost over, so it was very important for us to pick.”

The harsh economic situation that has taken hold since the start of the war means that many families can’t afford not to harvest their olives. “Lots of people have lost their jobs, factories in the village have closed along with some cafes and restaurants, and the ones that remain open have very few customers,” Arraf explained. “No one knows when this war will end and what its economic consequences will be, but the connection between the villagers and their land is emotional rather than solely economic: the olive groves are part of their sense of survival and steadfastness.”

Arraf was among the residents who chose to harvest their olives despite the dangers. “We worked fast out of fear, choosing trees that have lots of fruit on them and leaving the ones that had less,” he said. “One day, when I was picking in one of the distant groves, there was a siren. We didn’t know where to hide, and one piece of falling shrapnel nearly hit my father’s shoulder. That was the day a young man was killed by a missile that fell in the nearby village of Tarshiha, so we left the grove and went home.”

And while the local council tried asking the state for financial compensation for residents who were unable to harvest because of the war, they received very little assistance. “The problem is that they only compensate those who are defined as agricultural workers,” he continued. “Most of the villagers do not subsist from harvesting olives: they own land that was inherited from their ancestors, and harvest for personal and family use. So they’ll be screwed and won’t receive compensation.”

## **‘We Arabs have become the punching bags’**

Compounding their fear and mourning, the families and friends of Palestinian victims of rocket attacks in the north are also having to contend with the racism of their fellow Jewish citizens. A social media post announcing the death of Safa Awad, the schoolteacher in Shefa-Amr, was flooded

with [grotesque comments](#) celebrating her death because she was Arab. The [same thing occurred](#) after the news site Ynet announced the deaths of the two young men in Majd Al-Krum.

Alaa Haidar, a lawyer from the village of I'billin who lectures at several academic institutions in northern Israel, sees this wave of racism as no less murderous than the missiles — an opinion he voiced in a letter to Israel's attorney general demanding she address the issue.

"As soon as I saw the reactions, I couldn't remain indifferent," he told +972. "It was really hurtful: people were burying their loved ones and all the while encountering a wave of incitement and racism. Some wrote 'Next time, bomb Sakhnin and Arraba,' while others handed out baklava [in the streets]."

*Palestinians at the site where a missile fired by Hezbollah in Lebanon landed and caused damage in Ma'alot-Tarshiha, northern Israel, October 29, 2024. (David Cohen/Flash90)*

The decision to write to the attorney general rather than the police was deliberate. "We are not counting on the police because the national security minister himself [Itamar Ben Gvir, who is in charge of Israel's police] incites against Arabs and expresses racism, so we turned to the attorney general. I sent her links to racist and inciting posts and comments and demanded that she investigate the people behind them. I still have some faith in the law."

While all Haidar has received so far from the attorney general's office is an email confirming receipt of his letter, he was pleasantly surprised by the reactions to his initiative among other Palestinians. "I received many phone calls from residents and colleagues thanking me for the letter," he said. "I felt that even a letter could encourage people and give them hope that there's something to do."

Nonetheless, he warns that the situation for Palestinian citizens of Israel is deteriorating rapidly. "The cases of incitement and racism are only increasing; these days there are thousands per day," he said. "We Arabs have become the punching bag. We are here for them to take out their rage on us. There have been cases where racist statements have been translated into actions, and it was not dealt with. Even after the war ends, racism and incitement will continue rising."

Manna pointed out the authorities' double standards when it comes to punishing incitement. "I represented many young Arabs who were arrested on charges of supporting terrorism, and all they did was to post on social media calling for the end of the war and expressing pain for the genocide in Gaza," he said. "Some were sentenced to a year and a half [in jail]. Meanwhile, despite all of the racist comments [by Jewish Israelis] and direct calls to murder us, no one was investigated."

Despite these conditions, Zuzu, the high school safety officer from Jish, hesitates before complaining about the experiences of Palestinians in northern Israel. "I am ashamed to say that my situation is hard when we see what is happening in Gaza," she said. "At least I can shower, eat, and drink, and my refrigerator is full of food. My heart aches for Gaza, they have nothing. Children are burned alive in tents. And in Lebanon I see with my own eyes the smoke and fires caused by the [Israeli] shelling. It embarrasses me to say that I am suffering."

Despite some of Jish's houses being located north of the "conflict zone line," the Israeli authorities did not order the village's residents to evacuate, unlike neighboring Jewish communities. But Zuzu insisted that even if they had received evacuation orders, she and many other residents would have refused to go. "If we leave, what's to stop [Bezael] Smotrich and [Itamar] Ben Gvir from taking our homes?"

"We inherited the trauma of 1948 from our parents and grandparents, many of whom were refugees from [the depopulated villages of] Iqrit and Bir'em," she continued. "We know that those who leave

do not return. They can invent any excuse to expel us — nothing would surprise me. There's no justice in this country."

In a statement to +972, a spokesperson for the Israeli army denied that it is deliberately placing Iron Dome batteries closer to Arab villages rather than Jewish ones, claiming that "the IDF is operating in defense of all its civilians in an equal manner."

The spokesperson added that "the responsibility for establishing private shelters lies with the property owner, while the responsibility for establishing public shelters falls on the local authority. The Home Front Command works closely with the local authorities to help address these gaps — this includes refurbishing shelters and placing portable shelters in public areas."

**Suha Arraf**

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## **P.S.**

• +972. November 22, 2024:

<https://www.972mag.com/umm-al-hiran-destruction-zionist-demography/>

• Suha Arraf is a director, screenwriter and producer. She writes about Arab society, Palestinian culture, and feminism.

• **Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war. The world is reeling from Israel's unprecedented onslaught on Gaza, inflicting mass devastation and death upon besieged Palestinians, as well as the atrocious attack and kidnappings by Hamas in Israel on October 7. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing this violence.**

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to intensify their attacks on Palestinians. The most far-right government in Israel's history is ramping up its policing of dissent, using the cover of war to silence Palestinian citizens and left-wing Jews who object to its policies.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 14 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, entrenched occupation and apartheid, and a normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment – but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

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