



Two Years after Cast Lead: Two Years: Still Displaced

27 December 2010

From 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009, the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) launched a major offensive, unconscionable and illegal under international law; and unprecedented in scope and brutality against the Gaza Strip, with intense air, artillery and naval attacks on the Gaza Strip. During 22 days, the IOF destroyed 11149 houses (2645 completely and 8504 partially), leaving hundreds of thousands of people temporarily displaced and over 20,000 permanently displaced. Two years after the offensive, Al Mezan interviewed Mr. Odeh Sulaiman Irmilat, 58, and his son Mohammed, 30, who lost their homes in the offensive.

Odeh told Al Mezan that on Saturday 10 January 2009, he had been saying his Maghrib (sunset) prayers at the local mosque about 40 meters from his house. Afterward, some of his relatives walked back home with him. As they approached, an Israeli drone fired a “roof-knocking” rocket at his house, causing a loud explosion before his very eyes.

“I saw water falling down from the roof of my house and realized that an Israeli rocket had hit the water tank on the roof,” he said. Odeh recalled how he hurried



to tell his wife, sons, grandsons, and his daughters-in-law to hurry leave to leave the house. I had heard about the “roof-knocking” tactic in the news and expected a heavier missile attack within minutes,” he said. Indeed, barely five minutes later, “another missile hit the house. Everything had gone dark and I heard people shouting and screaming. The children were terrified and crying.”

His son, Mohammed added that he was at a neighbor’s house with other neighbors, about 100 meters from the house. “Suddenly,” he said, “we saw

people running in the street. I did not understand what was going on, so I asked



one of them why he was running. He told me that there was an attack on my house. I ran to my house. I saw smoke billowing out of the doors and windows. There were women, children and men running everywhere in the street. Confused and afraid, some people headed west and others east. I was desperately worried about my family.”

Their house was completely destroyed in the second attack. Odeh and his family - his wife, daughter, four sons and their wives, and grandsons, 25 in all - went to a relative’s house. They walked in dark and stayed there for about eight days. On 19 January 2009, a day after the attacks stopped, the family went to see what happened to their house. “I was shocked when I found my house totally destroyed; a pile of rubble.



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My grandsons asked me about the house's door and about their toys and bikes. I had no answers; I kept silent at the sight of the destroyed family home," said Odeh.

Odeh owns another old, asbestos-roofed house, but it is located some 150 meters from the border fence between Gaza and Egypt. Its windows and roof were partially destroyed in Israeli attacks. "We covered the windows with plastic and moved into it," Odeh said. We had no other place to go to, so I moved there with my wife and daughter."

Because the house is small, Odeh's four married sons had to move out and rent. They could find only small, tin-roofed houses. His son, Mohammed, rented a small cottage made of corrugated iron and tin. He could not afford a better place and had no proper furnishings for it, all of them having been destroyed in the earlier attack.

Mohammed told Al Mezan that he and his family stayed in a tent near the destroyed house for a month. But it was cold and windy for the kids, so they moved into the small cottage. It had more space and tin walls, and there were two bedrooms. In the past, its owner had used it for sheep. It was dirty but the family had no other option. He has been living there with his wife, Rania, 25, and children: Salah, 5, Taghreed, 3, Khadija, 2, and Ali, 3 months. Mohammed said that his children have been affected very badly by this change. They get sick more often and have difficulties sleeping. They always ask to move to a better house, like the one they had known before.

But the family has no money and, owing to the Israeli imposed siege and blockade of Gaza, there are no construction materials allowed in with which to rebuild the house.

Odeh said he wished he would be happy just to build a room for his son and his son's children. "It would be much better than the place they're living in now", he said, "but we are a big family and the assistance we get is hardly enough to survive." Odeh recalled the joy he had with his sons when they built a big house for the entire family three years before the attack. "It was destroyed in minutes," he added, "and we still have to repay the loans we borrowed to build it. We were a happy family living in a decent home; now we're scattered about in many places."

Mohammed commented that his family never did anything that could be deemed harmful to Israel. The family does not understand why their house was destroyed. It was far from the area of the smuggling tunnels and the family had always lived humbly and modestly. Mohammed is concerned about his children's health, but is more concerned about who they will grow up to be in the future having had such traumatic life experiences at such young ages, and being forced to continue on under such trying circumstances.