



Fact Sheet:

***Two Years after Cast Lead: Lives Still Destroyed
When You Beg to Be Used as a Human Shield!***

27 December 2010

During the heat of Israel's aggression against Gaza, on Monday 5 January 2009, Majdi Abed Rabbo, 43, was used as human shield. The use of civilians in this manner is a serious violation of international law as well as Israeli law.¹ The Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) used Majdi as a human shield for three days, during which he was ordered to enter an empty house being used by fighters close to his own home and speak to them. When released, Majdi was left to walk in the dark to Jabalia town in the north of the Gaza Strip. But before that, he was made to witness the IOF using bulldozers to destroy his own house. He did not know where his family were, as soldiers had taken him from his house while his wife and children were still in the yard. Today the children are still traumatized by the sight of their father being taken by soldiers under heavy firing in cold weather. Al Mezan interviewed Majdi and his wife, Asmahan, 40, two years after this ordeal.

Majdi tried to recall what happened to him and his family during the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip (Operation Cast Lead). "They used me as a human shield for three full days during which I went through unbearable fear that I've never experienced before," he told Al Mezan.

¹ For details on this practice and relevant legal analysis, please consult 'Hiding Behind Civilian: April 2009 Update Report Al Mezan report on the Use of Palestinian Civilians as Human Shields' at http://www.mezan.org/en/details.php?id=8632&ddna me=crimes&id_dept=22&id2=9&p=center.

"My suffering started at around 9:30am on Monday 5 January 2009. I was having breakfast with my family when I heard loud knocking at our door. When I opened the door, I was surprised to see an Israeli soldier hiding behind a man in his twenties. He was pointing his rifle at me and said in Arabic, 'take your pants off'. Then, he pointed at my underwear, so I took that off too. Then he ordered me to put my clothes on.

"A group of soldiers entered my house. One of them put his gun to the back of my head and, with another two soldiers, pushed me forward to search my house and my children. Even my little girl, Marah, who was only 14 months, was searched. They forced me to make a hole in the wall that separates my house and the adjacent house, which belongs to my cousin Hatem Abed Rabbo. This house has been empty for four years as Hatem has been outside Gaza. They forced me to enter through the hole into Hatem's house. The soldiers then pushed me outside. My wife and kids were ordered to stay in the yard. This was the last time I saw them until 3 days later.

"For the following three days I was made to enter a house where three Palestinian fighters had taken position. An Israeli commander threatened to hurt me when I refused to go inside the house and tell the fighters to surrender themselves. I went in and spoke to them, but they refused to surrender. Then the Israeli army opened heavy fire at the house, using explosives as well. Then, the commander ordered me to go and check if the fighters had been killed. They gave me a camera to take pictures. The fighters were alive. Then the house was attacked from the air and the commander ordered me to take a video camera and return to the house, take footage of them, take off their clothes and carry their rifles out. I was scared, but the commander threatened to hurt me. He spoke in



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Hebrew with another officer, who then walked towards me and told me in poor Arabic 'You are here to do what we tell you.' Then kicked me on my buttocks and said 'Go'. So I went in and took footage. By this point the fighters had been killed.

"The soldiers then took me to another house in the neighbourhood. When the firing was over, my house was still standing. I was lead to the house of Al-Katari family in the neighbourhood where I spent the night detained with other men.

"The next morning, on Tuesday, soldiers took me out of the Al Katari house. They ordered me to sit under a tree. From there I saw an Israeli tank accompanied by an armoured bulldozer moving towards Hatem's house. The bulldozer destroyed the house completely. I then saw the bulldozer destroying the southern wall of my own house. At that moment I started crying heavily and fell on the ground. The soldiers took me back inside the Al Katari house. At around 11am it became calm as the bulldozer had finished. At around 3pm on the same day soldiers took me with other two men out of the Al Katari house and I saw my house had been completely destroyed. They then pointed rifles at me from behind and forced me to enter three houses and search them.

"At around 11am on Wednesday 7 January 2009, all the people who had been detained in the Al Katari house were ordered to leave. I walked towards my uncle's house, but Israeli soldiers stopped me and cuffed my hands from behind. They took me to my uncle's house where I saw about 100 of my relatives and neighbours. At around 10pm, they released us and told us we had to go west to Jabalia town.

"I stayed with my family at my sister's house for four months. It was very depressing to have our house destroyed like this. I cannot understand why it was destroyed because it was standing when the fighting was

over. I could not sleep at all for many months. The situation for my family has been very difficult, we were badly traumatized. We received some psychological support from a local NGO. They gave me sleeping pills for six months, however whenever I slept I had nightmares with flashbacks of myself being used as a human shield and the destruction of my house, the house we had borrowed a lot of money to build. I cannot imagine a secure future for my family. Since our house was destroyed we have been renting a small apartment with two rooms and a kitchen. We are living a very difficult life, having to repay the old loan and rent an apartment. The Israeli siege makes it impossible for us to re-build, even if we get support from humanitarian NGOs or the UN.



"Al Mezan Centre and Adalah represented me and submitted a complaint on my behalf to the Israeli Military Advocate General's Office (MAG) about using me as a human shield. I went to Erez with other witnesses and gave our testimonies to the Israeli military police in the context of this investigation. In July 2010, Israel issued a report that mentioned that the MAG had decided to close my case without any charges



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of compensation. I was shocked when I read that the Israeli commander who forced me to do dangerous things claimed that I had asked to be used as a human shield. The report states that the "Israeli investigations into Mr. Abed Rabbo's case found that Majdi had asked the Israeli soldiers to enter the structure and to communicate with the armed men in an attempt to resolve the situation and avoid potential damage to his own house."²

"The report mentions that the commander was disciplined for accepting to allow me to enter the house and speak with the fighters. There is no mention of the threats against me. There is no word about using me as a human shield dozens of time, both in this house and other houses. Nor is there any mention of why my house was destroyed after the fighting stopped completely."

This conclusion, Majdi said, in anger "is a big lie," adding that "it was ridiculous to claim that I put myself to such danger and actually begged the Israeli force to use me as a human shield. If there is any notion of justice, the soldiers and commanders who used me this way must be prosecuted, in addition to those who ordered and executed the destruction of my house without any necessity," Majdi stressed.

² For more information see
<http://www.mfa.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/1483B296-7439-4217-933C-653CD19CE859/0/GazaUpdateJuly2010.pdf>