

## Beatings, theft and murder: The day the Israeli army came to Gaza's Yarmouk Stadium

By Maha Hussaini and MEE correspondent in Gaza, occupied Palestine

After weeks of dodging [Israeli](#) bombs in the Shuja'iyya neighbourhood of northern [Gaza](#), Youssef Hamdan al-Mubayyed took refuge with his family in Yarmouk stadium in Gaza City with hundreds of other [Palestinians](#).

Mubayyed thought it would be the safest place for him to be in Gaza, as the stadium was exclusively used by those displaced by Israel's military offensive since [7 October](#).

Instead it became somewhere he would be tortured, humiliated and threatened with death alongside dozens of other Palestinians.

Middle East Eye has spoken to Mubayyed and others who gave similar accounts, a sports stadium turned into a makeshift "interrogation and torture camp".

A place that became the scene of numerous atrocities, including murder.

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Founded in 1952, the Yarmouk Stadium is considered one of the largest and oldest sports stadiums in the Gaza Strip.

Following the Israeli invasion, images of the site appeared on social media, featuring hundreds of Palestinians, including children, stripped down to their underwear and watched over by Israeli soldiers.

### Stadium encircled

The events Mubayyed described took place on 24 December. He recalls being awakened at 4.30am, as Israeli tanks and soldiers encircled the stadium.

At around 6.30am, the Israeli army used loudspeakers to inform those in the stadium that the men among them would be separated for security checks.

'I lost count and I could not figure out where the strikes and punches were coming from'

- Mubayyed, Gaza

"One soldier asked for someone who spoke English and I told him I did," Mubayyed said.

"He ordered me to tell the men to take their clothes off and sit in lines," he told Middle East Eye.

The 24-year-old said that he and the other men were forced to drop their clothes in the dirt and sit in the cold, before the soldiers took interest in him for being able to speak English.

"A soldier counted the men in the line. One, two, three and four, that was me," Mubayyed recalled.

"He said 'come' and then the first thing he did was grab me by the neck, and hit me against the wall around two to three times.

"He said, you are Hamas but you don't want to admit it."

The soldier accused Mubayyed of being taught English by Hamas, an accusation he denied, but despite his denials the soldier continued to level accusations at him.

"You are one of the saboteurs, and you will work with us whether you like it or not," he recalled the soldier saying.

For his refusal to cooperate, Mubayyed was beaten with the butt of an M16 rifle before being made to sit up and being struck by a shoe.

"He asked for my personal information and I told him I was from the Shuja'iyya neighbourhood."



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The revelation resulted in more violence, the soldier struck Mubayyed again and others joined in.

“I lost count and I could not figure out where the strikes and punches were coming from,” he said.

The young Palestinian described being throttled by one soldier, as another soldier warned that he would allow his colleague to strangle him to death if he did not confess to being a member of Hamas. The same soldier then twisted his arm in an attempt to break it.

“I was tortured for an hour, before an officer threw me to the ground and ordered me not to raise my head. He told the others to shoot me if I raised my head. I stayed like that for around 20 minutes.”

Mubayyed’s torment ended when he was taken to a checkpoint, cleared by other soldiers and instructed to leave the stadium.

As he walked out, he could hear the sound of shelling in nearby areas and could see snipers on the roofs of buildings, shooting anyone who looked back at what was happening in the stadium.

He was shot himself when he turned around to look for his father. He took bullets in his arm and his lower back.

He recalled that nobody helped him and he lay on the ground for some time, before slowly making his way up and walking towards the Al-Shifa hospital around a mile away, which he eventually reached.

### ‘Shot in the back’

Um Ahmed Faraj was another Palestinian who took refuge in Yarmouk stadium after having been displaced countless times before, initially after her house in northern Gaza was bombed.

In November, she suffered serious injuries after an Israeli attack, which broke her jaw and left shrapnel embedded in her neck and tongue.

‘My mother-in-law was an elderly woman, they shot her in the back as we fled... She was martyred, but I could not carry her’

- *Um Ahmed Faraj*

Doctors had recommended she leave Gaza due to the severity of her injuries but unable to leave, the 43-year-old found herself stuck in the besieged territory in severe pain.

Her account bears strong similarities to Mubayyed’s.

She recalled that the stadium was surrounded amid heavy shelling during the early morning of 24 December.

Faraj added that Israeli soldiers started entering the location at around 4am, separating the men and women, and forcing the former to strip to their underwear.

“Many of them were beaten and tortured, including my husband and son. They stood there in their underwear while Israeli soldiers hit them with their weapons.”

Other eyewitnesses Middle East Eye has contacted mentioned the “humiliation” inflicted on the prisoners by Israeli soldiers, including being spat on.

They say that many displaced Palestinians were held for three hours before being subject to security checks.

Before Faraj could leave, she was told to leave everything but her ID card behind meaning she could not take her mobile phone or

money with her.

Like Mubayyed, she also mentioned that she and her family were targeted by Israeli snipers after leaving the stadium but in her case, the shooting resulted in the death of a relative.

“My mother-in-law was an elderly woman, they shot her in the back as we fled,” Faraj said.

“The bullet penetrated her back and left through her chest. She was martyred, but I could not carry her. Two young women helped me carry her [body away].”

Other witnesses told Middle East Eye that in the moments before entering the stadium, the Israeli military carried out a massacre at the entrances of the structure, killing dozens and injuring more.

## Stripped and robbed

The reports of abuses were not limited to torture and killings, but also included theft of valuables and money.

Abu Muhammed al-Sersawi, who is 54 and originally a resident of al-Wehda Street in Gaza City, took refuge in the stadium after his neighbourhood was bombed.

His elderly brother, who was injured during one attack, was detained on 24 December when Israel stormed the stadium.

'They stole all the money. We spoke to an Israeli officer about the money, he shot at us and told us: 'If I see you again, I will execute you'

- Abu Muhammed al-Sersawi, resident of Gaza City

To this day, no one in his family has heard about his brother's fate or whereabouts.

“We thought that the [military] operation was only in Shuja'iyya and Daraj (areas in eastern Gaza).

Sersawi, 54, told MEE. “We were stripped naked, and our clothes were taken away. Among us were children, adults, and elderly. But they did not care who anyone was.”

Some of the men were later given back their clothes, Sersawi said, but their pockets had been completely emptied.

“Some of the men were released, and others were taken away. When they were released, they got their clothes, but no money or possessions were found inside their pockets,” he added.

“My nephew had \$1,600 kept inside the case of his ID card. After he was released, he was not given his ID card, which was taken by the army, so we asked about it, and when they returned it, the \$1,600 was gone.

“They stole all the money. We spoke to an Israeli officer about the money, he shot at us and told us: 'Head to the south. If I see you again, I will execute you.' ”

“We fled out of fear.”

*Middle East Eye has approached the Israeli army for a response to the allegations contained in this article.*

*This article is available in French on [Middle East Eye French edition](#).*