

West Bank: Israeli Army Jeep Hits Two Palestinian Teens. Then One of Them Is Shot Point Blank

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An Israeli army jeep, in hot pursuit of two Palestinian teens riding an electric bike, rams them and they are thrown to the ground. A soldier places his rifle on the neck of one of them and pulls the trigger. Imru Swidan, 17, remains in critical condition and paralyzed

This time, there's no room for doubt, or for questions, excuses or lies from the Israel Defense Forces Spokesperson's Unit: The videos testify to what happened. They show an armored jeep in hot pursuit of two youths who are riding an electric bicycle. The side of the jeep rams the riders forcefully, knocking them off the bike. One of them manages to escape, the other is lying on his stomach, his face to the road. One of the soldiers who emerge from the jeep places the barrel of his rifle on the boy's neck. The image is blurred, but an enlargement makes it unmistakable what happened next: A bullet enters the youth's neck, shattering the upper part of his spine. Paralyzed and on a ventilator, he now is in the intensive care unit of a hospital in Nablus.

The event recalls the incident involving [Elor Azaria](#), the "Hebron shooter," who in 2016 shot and killed a Palestinian terrorist who had already been shot and subdued, but in a grimmer format. The youth in this case did not die on the road, and it's not clear what the two bike riders - 17 and 15 years old - had done that justified the chase by the jeep, or what triggered the fury of the soldiers, who decided to try to execute one of the youths by shooting him in the neck at zero range.

These disturbing questions will remain unresolved for all time. The IDF Spokesperson's Unit this week lost no time whitewashing, fudging and covering up the truth, making do with the usual generic, evasive and fictitious response to Haaretz's query: "A number of terrorists threw explosive devices at an IDF unit that was operating near the village of Azzun in the [territory of the] Ephraim Brigade on February 13, 2024. An IDF unit that was at the site took action to arrest them, and within that framework fired at one of them."

Words fail. Two teenagers on a bike become "a number of terrorists," their transgression unclear; "took action to arrest them" is how the army describes the shooting from zero range of an unarmed, helpless youth who was lying face-down on the road, which looks more like an attempted execution than anything else. "Took action to arrest"? The soldiers could have arrested the youth who was prostrate on the road very easily, but they preferred to shoot him even though he was injured and immobile. After the shooting, the soldiers left without arresting anyone.

An Elora Azaria-style deed, but the times have changed unrecognizably. No one will be tried for carrying out executions in uniform, not after the Azaria episode and still less after the [war in the Gaza Strip](#). No one even intends to investigate this incident; the IDF Spokesperson's Unit took no interest in the video that documents the deed. The jeep whose soldiers did this carried an Israeli flag on a towering mast. It was in the name of that flag that they shot the injured teenager on the road,

though they could have easily taken him into custody.

Imru Swidan is a 17-year-old from the town of Azzun, east of the West Bank city of Qalqilyah, across the border from Kfar Sava. Since 2003 the eastern entrance to the town has been blocked, and since October 7, its main entrance as well, to the south, has been sealed with an iron gate. Only one entrance remains open, from the west, via the neighboring village of Khirbet Nabi Elias, where frequent surprise army roadblocks hold up the traffic to and from the town for long hours. Shortly before we arrived in Azzun this week, soldiers were still there, harassing the local residents; fortunately for us, we arrived after they had departed.

The Swidan family lives in the family's residential compound in the town's center. Hanging on the wall of the living room, where we were received, are two guitars, and next to them sound equipment belonging to Imru's cousin. Imru is in a private hospital in Nablus, completely paralyzed. From photographs taken of him there, we can see that a breathing tube has been inserted into his throat, a brace holds his neck steady, his face is a ghastly white. It's difficult to tell whether he's conscious. He sometimes whispers something, his mother says. She thinks he's asking for verses from the Koran to be recited, because his death is near.

His father, Mohammed, 42, is by his side, and his mother, Arwa, 33, also visits, of course. The couple have four sons and two daughters – Imru is the firstborn, his mother wasn't yet 17 when she had him. The parents' trips to Nablus to be with their son are extremely challenging. Because of the many checkpoints around Nablus – the city has been almost besieged since the war started – the trip takes hours, despite the relatively short distance. This is what life is like now throughout the West Bank.



Arwa Swidan, Imru's mother. Credit: Alex Levac

It was on February 13, a Tuesday, two weeks ago. The IDF makes frequent incursions into Azzun, as was the case on that midday. Imru's mother relates that when he got up that morning, around 10 o'clock, as usual, she sent him to the market to buy vegetables. Because his electric bike was out of order, he went to a neighbor – a 15-year-old high-school student who has been his friend since childhood, and with whom he met every day (and who asked that his name not be used). With the friend's bike he did the errand for his mother. But he forgot to buy pita, so she sent him back. This time he would not return. He was shot a few hundred meters from home, on the town's main road.

The soldiers invaded the town via its closed eastern entrance. Imru pedaled, his friend standing on the bike. We have no information about what they did along the way, until the video shows the jeep chasing them and then toppling them. A Palestinian ambulance that was summoned to the site was held up for 10 minutes, according to testimony collected by 'Abd al-Karim Sa'adi, a field researcher for the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem. Only after the soldiers left could the paramedics get to the wounded youth.

He was taken to Omar al-Qassem Hospital in Azzun, from there he was rushed to Darwish Nazzal Hospital in Qalqilyah, and because he was in critical condition, he was moved to Nablus. There, say people in Azzun, he was fortunate to be treated by someone from his town, Dr. Abdallah Harawi, a

surgeon of repute. The surgeon's mother died that same day, but he operated on Imru. An X-ray shows the massive damage that was done to his spinal cord by the bullet.



Imru Swidan before he was shot.

Imru, his mother says, left school during the COVID pandemic, when he was in the 10th grade, and since then had been at home, idle. His father is a maintenance worker in Israeli hospitals. During the past year he was employed at Meir Hospital, in Kfar Sava, but since the war a closure has been imposed on the West Bank, so getting to his old job is out of the question. Many from the extended family worked in Israel and speak Hebrew.

Around midday, after Imru went back for the bread, friends called his mother to say that he had been wounded. Stunned, she phoned her husband, who had started a new job in a sewing shop in the nearby village of Jayus. He set out immediately for the hospital in Nablus, as did his wife, together with other relatives.

As they arrived, Imru was coming out of a CT scan, and his mother fainted at the sight of him. She returned home in the evening, to a house filled with neighbors and family. Now she prays to God every day for her son's condition to improve. In the meantime, there are no signs of that happening.

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P.S.

• Haaretz. Mar 2, 2024:

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/twilight-zone/2024-03-02/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/israeli-army-jeep-hits-two-palestinian-teens-then-one-of-them-is-shot-point-blank/0000018d-fcc8-d976-a19d-fecfd76c0000>