

In Gaza, a Six-year-old Lies Before a Tank Among the Bodies

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The name Hind Hamada won't mean anything to Israelis. And why would it? But her smiling face is probably now familiar to every Palestinian household.

A displaced Palestinian family on the road between Khan Yunis and Rafah, last week. Credit: MOHAMMED SALEM/Reuters

The name Hind Hamada won't mean anything to Israeli TV consumers. And why would it? Hind is a six-year-old girl from Gaza, and Israeli media doesn't talk about the human beings who struggle to remain alive there. Her smiling face is probably now familiar to every Palestinian household.

Her name and unknown fate have been mentioned in Palestinian news outlets on a daily basis for the past week, because occasionally, a single person, a single catastrophe, has to be held onto so as not to be numbed by the inconceivable number of Palestinian children we have killed, [which already exceeds 10,000 and continues to rise every day.](#)

Hind told her mother her hand was bleeding and that there was blood on her body. She said she was hungry, thirsty, and cold. They felt she was fading away.

At 1 P.M. on Monday, January 29, Hind joined her uncle, Bashar, her aunt, Anam, and their five children: Layan, 15; Sanaa, 13; Raghed, 12; Mohammed, 11; and Sara, 4. They intended to use their car to flee from a dangerous area in Gaza City to what they hoped would be a place of refuge. They were following the Israeli military's [call for Palestinians to leave parts of the city.](#)

At 2:28 P.M., [the Red Crescent headquarters in Ramallah](#) got a call from Germany. The caller was a member of the Hamada family who lives in Frankfurt. He said Layan had called one of her uncles in Rafah, terrified. She said the Israeli military had fired at the car. Her parents, three sisters, and brother had been killed, she said. She told him she was wounded, and that Hind was also alive. They were lying among the bodies.

Because the phone network in Gaza is patchy and unreliable, the uncle immediately called his cousin in Germany, who would be able to contact any organizations that might try to rescue the two girls. He thought of the Red Crescent. The relative in Germany gave Layan's number to the dispatcher there, who contacted her right away.

Their conversation, which lasted for about 20 seconds, was recorded. Hind told the dispatcher in it: "They're firing at us. The tank is next to me." The dispatchers asked, "Are you hiding?" She replied, "Yes, we're in the car. The tank is next to us." He asked another question: "Are you all in the car?" Before she could reply, a volley of gunfire was heard while she let out a long scream. She fell silent as the sound of fire continued until everything went quiet. The dispatcher called out repeatedly for someone to answer. No one did.

This truncated call was repeatedly played in its entirety in Arabic media outlets, with the background to it explained. Since then, an entire nation has been closely following the story of Hind, the only one of the seven passengers of the car who survived. Meanwhile, the Red Crescent was able to find the location of the car near the campus of Al-Azhar University Gaza .

[Five Washington Post journalists collaborated](#) to recreate the efforts to rescue Hind, detailing the chain of events in an article published Friday. The article said that at 3 P.M. on the previous Monday, the Palestinian Health Ministry in Ramallah had asked the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (Israel's governing body in the West Bank) to let it send an ambulance to rescue Hind. Permission arrived at 5:40 P.M., along with a map detailing the route for the nearest ambulance: a distance of about three kilometers (almost two miles).

The newspaper reported that when it requested a response from COGAT, it referred them to the IDF Spokesman's Office. That office told the Post, "We are unfamiliar with the incident described" - a generic reply that's all too familiar to this writer from other cases. The article noted that the paper had provided the spokesman's office with the coordinates the car's location as early as Tuesday morning, to no avail.

While waiting for the military to issue a permit for the ambulance, two Red Crescent [employees in Ramallah](#), Omar al-Kam and Rana Faqih, spoke to the 6-year-old Hind on the phone to try and find out where the tank was. Her answers were initially unclear, but she eventually said that the tank was moving and was in front of them.

Nisreen Qawwas, the head of the Red Crescent mental health department, joined the call and spoke with Hind. She told her to take deep breaths and tried to calm her down. She and the Red Crescent workers sensed they were beginning to lose her.

According to The Washington Post, the Red Crescent call center was able to reach Hind's mother and put her into contact with her daughter. The mother, whose name wasn't noted, told Al Jazeera that she was already in contact with her daughter when the Red Crescent asked to speak with her. "Because of the rain, I preferred for her to leave in a car with Bashar and his family," she said.

Qawwas told The Washington Post that the little girl had repeatedly told her mother "I miss you" as they spoke. Her mother promised she would soon see her and hug her. They talked about the sea, the sun, and her favorite chocolate cake. As Red Crescent staff listened, Hind told her mother her hand was bleeding and that there was blood on her body. She said she was hungry, thirsty, and cold. They felt she was fading away. "Come and get me," were the last words she spoke.

Meanwhile, the ambulance crew reported that it was approaching the location. Believing everything had been coordinated with the Israeli military, the employees in Ramallah told them to advance

slowly. Heavy fire was then heard, and the line to Hind was cut off, as was contact with the ambulance.

Each day since then - even 110 hours later, on Saturday morning - the Red Crescent has issued the same update: The fate of Hind and the Red Crescent medics who left to rescue her, Yousef Zeino and Ahmed al Madhoun, remains unknown.

Amira Hass

P.S.

- Haaretz. Feb 5, 2024 3:08 pm IST:

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-02-05/ty-article/.premium/in-gaza-a-6-year-old-lies-before-a-tank-among-the-bodies/0000018d-78b1-d4f1-a18d-fcf145400000>