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# Ayşenur Ezgi Eygi - 'She came here out of love': Palestinians, allies honor activist slain by Israeli army

Thursday 26 September 2024, by [ZIV Oren](#) (Date first published: 10 September 2024).

**Eyewitnesses recount the killing of Turkish-American Ayşenur Ezgi Eygi at a protest in Beita, decrying Israel's efforts to scare off international activists.**

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Last Friday's protest in the Palestinian town of Beita began like every week, with residents and activists gathering for noon prayers on a hill close to the Israeli settler outpost of Eviatar. Located south of Nablus in the occupied West Bank, the outpost was established in May 2021 on land belonging to residents of Beita. Ever since, Palestinians have [held weekly demonstrations](#) which the Israeli army has lethally repressed, killing 17 Palestinians in recent years. Last week, the town mourned its 18<sup>th</sup> victim.



*Friends, activists, Palestinian, and Turkish officials take part in an honorary funeral for Turkish-American activist Ayşenur Ezgi Eygi, who was killed by Israeli forces in Beita on Sept. 6, in the West Bank city of Nablus, September 8, 2024. (Oren Ziv)*

As soon as prayers ended that Friday afternoon, Israeli soldiers began firing tear gas and live ammunition at the residents and activists, forcing them to retreat back down the hill toward the houses. Mild confrontations ensued, with some of Beita's youths throwing stones in the direction of the soldiers, but the situation eventually calmed down.

But after a period of calm, an Israeli soldier, who had taken up a position on the roof of one of the Palestinian houses further uphill, suddenly fired two live bullets: the first hit a Palestinian resident in the leg, and the second hit 26-year-old Turkish-American activist Ayşenur Ezgi Eygi directly in the head.

"We were just standing, not doing anything, and fully visible to the army," a 32-year-old Italian activist who goes by the name Maria told +972. "All of a sudden I heard two gunshots. A second

later, someone called my name, and I turned around to see that Ayşenur was lying unconscious on the ground, with blood coming out of her head. I called more people over, and we called an ambulance which took her to a hospital in Nablus. They tried to resuscitate her, but she died soon after.”

Jonathan Pollak, an anti-Zionist Israeli activist who regularly attends protests in Beita, was also nearby when the shooting happened. “Immediately after the second shot, I heard someone screaming for help,” he told +972. “I ran toward them; they were about 15 meters away.



*Friends and activists mourn the death of Turkish-American activist Ayşenur Ezgi Eygi, who was killed by Israeli forces in Beita on Sept. 6, in the West Bank city of Nablus, September 8, 2024. (Oren Ziv)*

“When I got there, [Eygi’s] head was gushing with blood,” he continued. “I kneeled beside her and put my hand behind her head to try and stop the bleeding, but it was impossible. I tried to take her pulse; it was really weak. I looked up for safety and saw a direct line of sight to where the soldiers, whom I had already seen on the roof, were positioned.”

As reports of the shooting emerged, the IDF Spokesperson [stated](#) that soldiers had opened fire “at a key instigator who had been throwing stones at the forces and posed a threat to them.” An army probe further claimed on Tuesday that Eygi was likely hit “indirectly and unintentionally by IDF fire that was not aimed at her,” which occurred “during a violent riot in which dozens of Palestinian suspects burned tires and hurled rocks toward security forces.”

According to eyewitnesses, however, the stone throwing had ended around 20 minutes before Eygi was shot, and took place in a completely different part of the town. Eygi had not been involved in the confrontations, and was simply standing in the residents’ olive groves — a distance of around 230 meters from the rooftop where the shooter was positioned, +972 confirmed at the site on Sunday.

“It was completely quiet when it happened, and you would have to be an Olympic stone thrower to reach the soldiers from there anyway,” Pollak said. Moreover, he added, unlike other weeks, the protesters had not tried to get close to the outpost, which is several hundred meters away from where the prayers had taken place.

Another eyewitness, a 30-year-old American volunteer who goes by the name Vivi, told +972: “[Eygi] was with other internationals trying to find some shade. There is no doubt that the Israeli army knew she was an international volunteer: first, she was standing next to other internationals; and second, there were no local women at these demonstrations.”



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After Eygi's killing, Beita residents placed stones on the ground to mark the spot where she was shot. According to Munier Khadier, 65, Israeli forces have since come to the site several times — on one occasion confiscating a Palestinian flag, and on another removing a stone soaked with blood. "They wanted to [make it look like] a Palestinian had killed her, but I told [a soldier], 'We were sitting here; you shot her.'"

Mohammad Hamaya, another resident, told +972: "A group of activists always comes to the protests to witness what is happening in Beita and to inform the world that the settlers stole our land and the army is attacking us. We are very sad that the blood of Ayşenur was spilled on Beita's lands. Her words and her desire to stand with us didn't reach the world, but her blood will send a message of the ones who stand with Beita, and with Palestine.

"I'm sure the army knows they are activists with international connections and therefore their voices are heard more than ours," Hamaya continued. "That's why it wants to silence them."

### **'Kill without witnesses'**

International and Israeli activists have joined Palestinian-led protests in the West Bank for decades, operating on the assumption that their presence might, even slightly, restrain the violence of Israeli forces. This was [particularly evident in the early 2000s](#) during demonstrations against the construction of Israel's separation wall: soldiers would observe from a distance, assessing whether Israeli or foreign activists were present before deciding how to disperse them.

Eygi arrived at Ben Gurion Airport on Sept. 1 from Türkiye, where she had been visiting her family. After spending several days in East Jerusalem, she attended a training in the West Bank with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), an NGO that brings volunteers from abroad to join Palestinian-led nonviolent resistance to the Israeli occupation. The protest on Friday was her first action with ISM.



*Friends, activists, Palestinian, and Turkish officials take part in an honorary funeral for Turkish-American activist Ayşenur Ezgi Eygi, who was killed by Israeli forces in Beita on Sept. 6, in the West Bank city of Nablus, September 9, 2024. (Oren Ziv)*

Eygi is the third ISM volunteer killed by Israeli forces, and the first in more than two decades. In March 2003, American volunteer [Rachel Corrie](#) was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer while protesting against the demolition of Palestinian houses in the southern city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip. The following month, British volunteer Tom Hurndall was shot in the head by an Israeli soldier in the same city, leaving him in a coma; he died nine months later. Many other ISM activists have been severely wounded over the years, some of them irreversibly.

E.N., a friend of Eygi from the United States and a fellow ISM volunteer, told +972 that neither of them had been to Palestine before, and they made the decision to travel there together. “We were trying to take in both the beauty and history of the land and the friendliness and hospitality of the people we encountered, alongside the reality of the colonial and apartheid regime,” he explained. “It was surreal for both of us.”

Friday was supposed to be the first action for both of them. “We were brand new,” E.N. said. “She was aware of the risks; she had a clearer picture than me about the situation in different parts of the West Bank. She had a sober picture of reality, from talking to people and researching and knowing people that experienced tragedies.

“But it is still hard to grasp if you haven’t spent a lot of time here,” E.N. went on. “How can you know that you will get shot in the head in the first hour or two of being on the ground? She wasn’t on the frontline but at the back, and they still murdered her.”

According to E.N., Eygi had organized a fundraiser for Gaza in recent months and was active in the Gaza solidarity encampment at University of Washington in Seattle, from which she had recently graduated. Several years ago, she was also involved in the Dakota Access Pipeline protests led by Native Americans at Standing Rock.



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“She was young and bright, and an organizer for freedom and liberation for all people and against colonialism,” E.N. said. “She came out of [the university encampment] and decided to come here because, despite people’s efforts, for the most part the encampment had little material impact. It was depressing. So people like her were looking for other ways to act.”

Neta Golan, an anti-Zionist Israeli activist who co-founded ISM and is based in the West Bank, told +972 that she sees the murder as evidence that the Israeli army “wants to kill [Palestinians] without witnesses. It’s like the canary in the coalmine: it shows the genocidal level that things have reached.” Regarding the danger to ISM participants, Golan added that the organization “makes sure they know the risks and make their own decisions as to what they want to do.”

A 30-year-old Canadian activist who goes by the name Zee, who was in the ISM training with Eygi, told +972: “She was a very gentle person, very loving. There was no violence in her heart. She didn’t want to be near violence, she just wanted to protect. She came here out of love: love for Palestinians,

and love for the world.

“We knew that Beita was a dangerous place to be, but she still chose to go for the cause, to be part of liberation — and she was killed for it,” Zee continued. “She was killed to scare the rest of us international volunteers, so that we won’t come and support Palestinians. In our training, we practiced scenarios about how to decide together what to do if something [like this] happens. She would always say, ‘We’ll stay with the Palestinians. We won’t abandon them.’”

## **‘We care about Palestine, so the U.S. government doesn’t care about us’**

On Sunday, around 20 international activists from ISM and Faz3a — another group that brings international volunteers to Palestine, whose members have also been [shot in Beita](#) and [assaulted by settlers](#) in recent weeks — gathered outside the morgue in Nablus’ Rafidia Hospital for an honorary funeral for Eygi.



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The activists were allowed to enter only briefly to say goodbye ahead of a short ceremony led by the Palestinian Authority (PA). Türkiye’s consul general in Jerusalem was also present, along with the governor of Nablus and the head of the PA’s Wall and Settlement Resistance Commission. Eygi’s body was then driven to Ben Gurion Airport to be transported on to Türkiye.

“We are asking the volunteers’ home countries and the UN to give protection to human rights defenders,” Mohammad Khatib, one of the coordinators of Faz3a, told +972. “There is a need for more volunteers as communities across the West Bank face escalating attacks by settlers and the army. The army wants to scare internationals away so that it is easier to isolate and transfer Palestinian communities off their land.”

A 22-year-old American-Syrian activist with Faz3a, who goes by the name Lulu, attended the funeral on Monday with her hand in a cast; she was injured last week during a settler attack in the nearby village of Qusra. “We called the [U.S.] embassy and tried to report the attack, and they didn’t even answer,” she said of the incident. “We care about Palestine, so they don’t care about us, even though we are American citizens. They want to be blind to what is happening. I will never stop, and I will stay here as long as I can. I’m prepared to die with the Palestinians.”

Maria was also defiant that, despite this tragedy, the ISM activists will continue their work in the West Bank. “We’re mourning our friends and comrades, but our team is still on the ground,” she said. “The community wants us there and we still believe that our presence offers a layer of protection. We know that Israel is repressing whoever stands in solidarity with the Palestinian people — but we believe it’s a just cause. And it’s our governments that have been funding and fueling everything happening here in Palestine.”

Zee, too, hopes their presence can still be beneficial to Palestinians. “I like to think it still makes a

difference,” she said. “In some of the places where we’re active, the settlers stay a little further away when we’re there. Sometimes the army doesn’t come as close or bother us as much. That’s why all of us are still here, and several of the Palestinians leading us believe it still helps. But the Israeli army is showing that there are no red lines — they’re willing to kill internationals [too].”



*Anti-Zionist Israeli activist Jonathan Pollak at the site where Turkish-American activist Ayşenur Ezgi was shot dead by Israeli forces, Beita, occupied West Bank, September 8, 2024. (Oren Ziv)*

Among the activists, there is a consensus that Eygi’s blood is not only on Israel’s hands.

“It’s not only the fault of the Israeli army or the soldier who shot her, but also of the U.S. government for not doing anything to protect its citizens,” Vivi said. “A couple of weeks ago, another U.S. citizen was shot in the leg in Beita and the American government didn’t respond. Because of that, Ayşenur is dead today..”

“This is not an isolated incident,” Pollak insisted while standing next to the improvised memorial for Eygi at the site of her killing. “The bullet that killed Ayşenur is the same bullet that killed a 13-year-old Palestinian girl the same day, just a few kilometers south of here. These are the same American-funded bullets that Israel uses to perpetrate genocide in Gaza with complete impunity. And this happens because the world does not demand accountability.”

Pollak is certain the killing was intended as a threat to foreign activists: “The [army’s] message is that resistance will not be tolerated, whether it’s by Palestinians or internationals. [The soldiers] know they just need to say that they felt a threat to their lives, and then the system will ensure their impunity. No matter how much violence they use, we will continue standing with Palestinians for liberation.”

“They want to scare us,” Zee said outside the morgue in Nablus. “They don’t want more people to come to help Palestinians and see what it’s really like here. But we won’t be deterred. All of us want to live, but we want Palestinians to be free.”

**Oren Ziv**

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**P.S.**

• +972. September 10, 2024:

<https://www.972mag.com/jit-settler-pogrom/>

• Oren Ziv is a photojournalist, reporter for Local Call, and a founding member of the Activestills photography collective.



- Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war - the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel and the massive retaliatory Israeli attacks on Gaza. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed unleashed by these events has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Hamas' murderous assault in southern Israel has devastated and shocked the country to its core. Israel's retaliatory bombing of Gaza is wreaking destruction on the already besieged strip and killing a ballooning number of civilians. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to escalate their attacks on Palestinians.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 13 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, the entrenched occupation, and an increasingly normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment - but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is the leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists and activists can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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