



**MAP**

MEDICAL AID FOR PALESTINIANS

**BRIEFING  
PAPER**

**THE SABRA & SHATILA MASSACRE  
30 YEARS ON**

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## ABOUT MAP

**MAP works for the health and dignity of Palestinians living under occupation and as refugees.**

Established in the aftermath of the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, MAP delivers health and medical care to those worst affected by conflict, occupation and displacement. Working in partnership with local health providers and hospitals, MAP addresses a wide range of health issues and challenges faced by the Palestinian people. With offices located in Beirut, Ramallah and Gaza City, MAP responds rapidly in times of crisis, and works directly with communities in the longer term on health development.

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## BRIEFING PAPERS

In addition to our health and medical work, MAP is committed to challenging the root causes that underpin our existence. We do this through our advocacy work, which is aimed at raising both public and political awareness about the issues that impact on the health of Palestinians.

This is the third in a series of briefing papers which aim to provide an accessible and reliable account and analysis of the issues that determine Palestinian health. It is based on in-depth interviews with survivors of the massacre of Sabra and Shatila in 1982.

Very special thanks to everyone who took part in the interviews. Our thanks also to Mahmoud Aladawi, Jonathan Broadbery and James Denselow – without whom this publication would not have been possible.

We would also like to express our deep gratitude to Dia Azzawi, for giving us permission to use his painting 'Sabra Shatila', for the front cover. The painting was created by the artist in response to the 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees in Beirut.

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# INTRODUCTION

## STEVEN JAMES



IMAGE: View from Gaza Hospital, Shatila refugee camp, 1982



This year, Medical Aid for Palestinians, our partners and supporters, remember the tragic events of thirty years ago that occurred in Sabra and Shatila. Over a period of two nights in September 1982, Lebanese Phalangist militia, with the support of the Israeli military,

slaughtered unarmed men, women and children in the dilapidated refugee camp.

MAP was set up by Dr Swee Ang and a group of medical professionals and humanitarians in response to the horrific massacre and many of our staff, volunteers and partners remain in contact with the survivors.

Palestinians are living in Lebanon today in a state of chronic crisis as long-term refugees. At the end of last year, we launched our report "Terminal Decline? Palestinian Refugee Health in Lebanon", which highlighted the extent to which healthcare in Lebanon is underfunded and chronically unfit for the needs of the refugee population.

MAP's work in the refugee camps across the country focuses on development and building on the resources of the Palestinian community, by supporting long-term interventions, advancing existing initiatives and working in partnership with local organisations.

Beyond our work on the ground, we at MAP are committed to highlighting the continued exile of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living in Lebanon as refugees. With the peace process in a state of complete inertia and continued bloodshed in Syria, the issue of the refugees has dropped further down the agenda of politicians and international institutions.

Over the past six months, MAP's team in Lebanon has been interviewing survivors of different ages and backgrounds together with their relatives. As requested some of the names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their identity.

This briefing paper contains material that people may find extremely disturbing. It puts the voices and stories of the survivors of the massacre at its core and should serve as a wakeup call for action on the situation for refugees in Lebanon.

**STEVEN JAMES**  
MAP Chief Executive



# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



IMAGE: Palestinian refugees making their way to Lebanon from Galilee in October/November 1948

During the 1948 Nakba, approximately 100,000 Palestinians were forced from their homes by Israeli troops and militia and fled into Lebanon, a country with a population at the time of approximately 1,127,000. The Palestinian refugees came mainly from the north of Palestine, from Galilee and the coastal cities of Jaffa, Haifa and Acre. Although there was historical familiarity based on social and economic links between the people of northern Palestine and southern Lebanon, the main barrier separating the two peoples concerned the refugee status of the Palestinians. As refugees they had a specific identity, specific areas of residence (the refugee camps) and, after 1950, a specific service provider - namely the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Initially, the Lebanese government's policy was one of acceptance and support of the Palestinian cause. President al-Khoury told the Palestinians, "our house is your house".

Yet the reality was somewhat different and life was hard for the newly arrived refugees. In 1948 the influx of a largely Sunni Palestinian population, almost equal to 10% of the Lebanese population, threatened to tip the balance of the Lebanese 1943 National Pact, which managed power in the country between sectarian groups.

Limited assimilation of Palestinians did occur, with some 40,000 receiving citizenship between 1948 and 1978. However, the majority of Palestinians, who were either unable or unwilling to take Lebanese citizenship, lived in 17 refugee camps and numerous unofficial settlements around the country. The positioning of these camps was important. The Lebanese authorities attempted to transfer Palestinians away from the border with Israel, instead setting up new camps predominantly near urban areas.





IMAGE: The massacre at Sabra and Shatila



IMAGE: Dr Swee Ang with children from the camp

The Fatah Palestinian political party took over the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1969, and was subsequently ejected from Jordan in 1970. This created a demographic and political shift that also affected the balance of power in Lebanon. Under the Cairo Agreement (1969), the Lebanese state effectively wrote off part of its sovereignty, allowing Palestinians to have control over the camps and to use them, as well as large parts of south Lebanon, as launching grounds for their battles against Israel.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon as part of Operation 'Peace for Galilee'. The Israeli operation killed approximately 17,000 Lebanese civilians, and Israeli forces advanced all the way to Beirut. What followed was the darkest era for Palestinians living in Lebanon.

Yasser Arafat and the PLO fighters were forced to leave the country, and their evacuation was followed by a bloody massacre at the Palestinian camp of Sabra and Shatila.

On 14<sup>th</sup> September, Bachir Gemayel, president-elect and leader of the Phalangist party, was assassinated. Two days later the massacre began. It was carried out by the Lebanese Christian militia and supported by the Israeli military. For 40 hours, between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> September, the militia raped, killed and injured over 1,000 unarmed Palestinian and Lebanese civilians in the camps.

## DR SWEE ANG



IMAGE: Dr Swee Ang, Beirut 1982

*Dr Swee Ang was working as a volunteer surgeon in Gaza Hospital inside Sabra and Shatila refugee camp when the massacre occurred.*

There was a ceasefire operating, the international peacekeeping force came in to safeguard the whole thing and then suddenly on 15 September the ceasefire was violated. Israeli tanks rolled in under air cover. There was a land invasion into Beirut and they shelled their way through the southern bit of the city and then went straight for Sabra and Shatila. We were surrounded by tanks, which shelled the refugee camp, and after a few hours the massacre started.

I was in a basement operating theatre of Gaza Hospital all this time because wounded people were pouring in. Many of them died and everyone was really frightened. You know, Palestinians are very stoic people. They're used to being bombed, but they had terror in their faces. Of course my Arabic was hopeless and also I was very busy with my team operating, so it was only when I found someone to explain what was going on to me, that they said gunmen had broken into their homes and were shooting whole families, killing them without reason. Many

non-wounded people flocked to the hospital because Christian Aid had twenty-two volunteers inside and they thought that the presence of foreigners might help. But soon we got news that Acre Hospital, which was on the periphery of the camp, had been invaded and that people had been killed and nurses raped, so hospitals were not safe. The Israeli army was not bringing its regular forces, but a group of militia. At the time we didn't know who they were. So the several thousand inhabitants of the hospital – a small hospital – left and only the wounded remained. On the morning of 18 September, we were ordered to leave too.

The massacre changed me. It made me realise that we, the international community, had done a grievous wrong to the Palestinian people. I can talk about Sabra and Shatila confidently. These Palestinian refugees were forced out of their homes in 1948. They walked across the border and UN Resolution 184 – the right of return – was passed saying they could go back. But they never returned. They were first put up in tents and their children grew up. A fourth generation was growing up when the massacre took place. The tents went, homes were built and they built a whole town.





IMAGE: Children in the camp

Sabra and Shatila refugee camp is a misnomer because it is actually a town. And to remember their Palestine, they called their hospitals 'Gaza', 'Ramallah' and so on. It is fair to say that children in the camps grow up knowing where they are from, even though they have never seen their homes. That is the kind of history they carry inside them.

I hold two postgraduate degrees, and I never knew of their existence. So what have we done to these people? What have we done to them, to discover the injustice done to them like that, only through their death? All you had to do is walk up to one of the mutilated bodies and you could see on their ID card, where they were from. At that time, in the 20th century, in 1982, the world had allowed a refugee identity card to be a means of recognising the humanity of the Palestinian people.

I'm not even talking about death. Those who have died, have died. We can't do much about it. The families grieve, the children grow up. But now from 1982 to 2012, what are we doing about that? Individuals do try to do many things, but as a collective international community we have not done enough. It can't continue like this if we want to stop it.



IMAGE: Dr Swee Ang, Beirut 1982

# STORIES OF THE SURVIVORS



IMAGE: The Memorial: "The Martyrs of the Massacre of Sabra and Shatila, 1982"

## ELIAS CHEHADE, 74

I went to the Aarsan quarter to try and find my family and saw many corpses, maybe around 80-100, but not all were complete. They weren't just Palestinians either; there were Syrians and Lebanese too.

When the Lebanese Red Cross came to prepare the mass graves, one for men and one for women and children, I recognised the body of my mother, but only from her clothes and my daughter who was with her.

*Elias disappeared into the bedroom. He came out again moments later clutching envelopes from which he produced death certificates for his family members from the Palestinian Red Crescent Society at Gaza Hospital.*

*The certificates were for his young grandson; his granddaughter, aged 3; his son-in-law, aged 27; his mother, aged 70; his daughter, aged 9; and his son, aged 11*

I heard of one Lebanese family that lost all 32 members that night. Their bodies were taken away so they wouldn't be buried with the Palestinians.

The events of 1982 were just part of a long history of abuses that we endured as Palestinians in Lebanon by the Syrians, the Israelis and the Lebanese militias. I now live deep inside Shatila camp because my old house was taken over by the Amal militia<sup>1</sup> during the war of the camps. Palestinians fought against so many groups during the civil war. Now the war is over we have no chance to recover what was lost.

My daughter was involved in the International Criminal case against the Israelis in the Belgian courts around ten years ago. She wanted to get justice for her family as people know that the Israelis allowed the massacre to happen. The case was stopped by the courts after they decided there was a case to answer, but it couldn't be brought under Belgian law.



## UMM ALI, 72

*Umm Ali couldn't remember how old she is now, or was at the time of the massacres, but she clearly remembers being 8 years old when she left Palestine.*

I was around 40-45 years old and living in Sabra at the time (an area at the edge of the Shatila camp which was made up largely of Palestinians but also poor Lebanese and Syrians).

My house was near to Gaza Hospital and when the Israeli army set up checkpoints around the camp, my relatives from five families came to my place. At the time, I was running a bakery and on the Saturday morning I realised I had no bread left, so I started to prepare more in the kitchen. My neighbour came shouting to me, "Umm Ali, Umm Ali, they've taken your family", and I returned from my kitchen to the living room to find that all the people in my house had gone.

From the five families, there were around thirty people. Now only me and my husband, who had been asleep in another room, were left. We went straight away to find them. The militia had taken them to al Doukha street just inside the camp. I tried to get my children back but the militias wouldn't let me, so they kept us all together.

The militiamen made us sit down on the bodies of people who had already been killed. My daughter turned to me and told me that the body she was sitting on was cold. The men dragged us to our feet and made us walk. They tried to take



my daughter but I refused to let them, shouting that we were surrendering and so they couldn't harm us.

I thought they might have been Jewish, so I started shouting that I came from a village the Jews call Rosh Pina in northern Palestine. I started to shout at them that we lived with Jews in Rosh Pina.<sup>2</sup> An Israeli soldier heard what was going on and came over. He asked me why I was talking about Rosh Pina to this man. He told me that the man I was addressing was not an Israeli but a Kitaebi<sup>3</sup> and the soldier took my daughter from him and brought her back to me.

The militiaman who had been trying to take my daughter got angry at this and took a pregnant woman. I saw him kill her and then cut the baby from her stomach before stamping on it. He swore and claimed that the baby's father had been a fighter.

While they kept us there, they took some of the men one by one. We saw one man being run over with a truck and others were killed. Later we were taken towards the Kuwaiti embassy and men were separated from the women and children. It was only because I continued to tell everyone I came across that I was from Rosh Pina that an Israeli soldier escorted me and my daughter back home.

My son managed to escape with three cousins. He told me that they ran and ran and didn't stop until they got to Cornish el Mazrah (about two miles from Shatila). They passed many armed vehicles and tanks. He could never tell me how he did it, he said it felt like he was flying.

My sister-in-law was looking for her family when we were back at the camp, but she couldn't find them. I was able to return to my house in Sabra. For two years, I had to constantly care for my son and daughter who were extremely traumatised by what they had seen. My daughter was fourteen at the time and she is still visiting a psychiatrist because of the trauma she suffered. If people talk about what happened she starts to scream or cry. She couldn't talk about it like I am now.

I can remember what happened very clearly. I still feel very, very angry. There were a lot of things done during the civil war, especially to civilians, but this massacre was different. We were treated terribly – not just the killings but the things we were made to see and to endure. Still, I feel lucky and thank God that I survived with my children.

As for the Palestinians in Lebanon, we live only because there is no death. I've been suffering as a Palestinian since I was 8 years old. We are treated like cattle, pushed from place to place, killed and kept in poverty by outsiders.

2 The village's name was Jaoun in Arabic

3 A member of the Kataeb militia - known in English as Phalangist militia

## BAHEEJA ZREIN, 63



*Baheeja's house is located down a street about half a kilometre away from one of the main entrances to Shatila camp.*

I was 33 years old and lived here at the time with my three daughters, six sons and my husband as well as my mother and my sister.

On the first night, the Thursday night, I remember the light bombs and the sound of heavy vehicles coming from the direction of the camp. Then, two men came from the camp accusing Haddad's army<sup>4</sup> of starting a massacre, but we didn't believe that this could be the case.

Firstly, there had been rumours of this kind of thing before that had turned out to be false and in addition, the Israelis and the Haddad army came from the south where there were other camps. So why would they not do that sort of thing there, but do it in Beirut?

Secondly, the Israelis had moved in two or three days before and soldiers had been in and around the camp but not killed anyone, so why would they start killing people now?

Finally, everyone knew that the PLO and the fedayeen<sup>5</sup> had left Beirut and the camps, so we didn't believe that these things would be done against civilians.

On Friday, we spent the day at home and we didn't see anyone, but we heard sniper fire throughout the day. During the night or early hours of Saturday morning, two more people came from the camp saying that the massacre was serious and that people should leave the area. Some families left straight away but we stayed to see what was happening. As well as my family, my two brothers, Walid and Nabeel, were also staying with us.

When it got to around 5am we decided to leave the area with the whole family. I was most worried about my eldest boys, who were twelve and thirteen – around the age when boys stop being seen as children and become the target of army detention in situations like these.

The main route into the camp was at the end of my street and we were surprised to see a large group of people walking towards the camp, not away from it. I remember that there was a white banner hanging over the entrance. At the time, I was standing with my three boys, my brothers and my three younger girls.

Ahead of the crowd, there were four armed men at the entrance of the camp gesturing to men in the crowd to come forward and enter. I think it was understood by most that it was a form of surrender and they were entering the camp to be questioned or checked. No one was fighting or struggling. I remember that the armed men were wearing armbands with 'MP' on them and I was surprised to hear that they spoke in Arabic. Until then I had assumed they were Israeli.

My two brothers and sons joined the crowd when the men gestured to them, but I turned back to go home. I was followed by armed men who asked if there were any fighters in the area. I told them there weren't, but they searched the district and took 18 young men away. They carried on working their way towards Gaza Hospital.

I sent my children away with my mother and my sister. They managed to get away with two of my girls and my three youngest sons, but I still had my nine-month-old daughter with me and it was too late to send her with them.

I went with my daughter back to the camp where we were ushered in by the militia men. There were lots of people



standing around in the main street, so I started to look for my brothers and my sons who had gone with them. I found them alive. I remember seeing the 18 men from my district that the militia had taken. They were brought in with other people from Gaza Hospital and the surrounding area.

There were armed men on the roofs overlooking the main street where people were gathered. We started to suspect that the massacre was real and, although people weren't panicking, my brother wanted to try to get away. He wanted to try and escape, to warn people who were still being brought into the camp. I convinced him not to go because I was worried what would happen to him as we were surrounded. We were there from around 8:00 – 9:30, about an hour and a half. They were rounding up more and more people and bringing them into the camp from the streets around.

We hadn't seen any bodies at this point, we just had a bad feeling following the rumours. Then we were instructed to walk all together up the road, deeper into the camp. After about five minutes of walking we started to see piles of bodies. If you tried to look away from one pile you found yourself looking at another. I ended up closing my eyes and being shielded by my brother. I was still carrying my baby at this point.

We stopped just short of where the mass grave is<sup>6</sup> and the order was given to separate men from women and children. The militiamen came in among the group, while others stood on buildings above. My brother tried to move away from the family so that my sons would be left and not taken with them. He was trying to make sure that the children might survive.

I asked one of the armed men whether my sons were classed as men or boys. I remember his answer: "You're all the same; it makes no difference."

The men were mocking and insulting us at this point. Then they began picking people out. I saw my neighbour, Abu Ismad, taken from the crowd. I don't know why, but he was wearing the white coat of a doctor. He was a plumber. I watched them take him behind a sand wall, then I heard a gunshot and he didn't come back. People started to panic, but there was nowhere for us to go. We were cornered. This was the first point I saw actual Israeli soldiers. They were deployed beyond the other entrance to the camp, on the main road towards the Kuwaiti embassy. They were acting as a kind of barrier, sealing the camp off.

After the militiamen shot someone or took a few people away to be shot, they demanded that we in the crowd applaud. They were trying to humiliate us further. The men were directed to walk with the young men being taken first. After a while the men were ordered to keep walking and the women were told to go back to the camp. The Israeli army were deployed along the way and we

tried to find other routes to get away, but there were damaged buildings and fires all around.

My eldest son, who was 13, went with my brothers and the younger two boys were with me and the baby. I went back to my home via Sports City because we heard that they were taking people there. But I only found my son, I couldn't find my two brothers.

We made our way back to the camp, to where the bodies were, and joined other people in looking through the bodies. By this time the militias had withdrawn and we were left alone. I wanted to find my brothers or identify other family members. I recognised among the bodies many of the 18 young men I had seen taken prisoner earlier. They hadn't been shot, they had been killed with axes or knives. Their bodies were mutilated and not all of them were whole. We were searching among bodies, turning them over to try and find my brothers. There were severed heads and limbs; we were looking through bodies and body parts. There were other women and their families doing the same.

All my neighbours were taken, even though we were mixed between Palestinians, Lebanese and some Syrians. No one cared or asked about nationality; we were all rounded up together.

My brother, Nabeel, managed to escape when an explosion occurred near to where they were being made to walk. He escaped and made his way back home. Waleed was picked out of the crowd and taken off somewhere by car. We never saw him again.

It is impossible to forget what happened. Since then, every time I hear about massacres or civilians being killed I think of what happened to us. My mother used to wake up in the night calling for Waleed. We never found out what happened to him.

After that there were many sieges of the camp. They all leave, have left, deep wounds. I think the memory has to be kept alive. We should remember those who died or are 'missing', the victims. We should also use the event to remember our situation as Palestinians in Lebanon. There have been no real improvements and there is no justice for us.

Yes, there were Israelis who came here and attacked us. But there were also, and still are, local 'Israelis' (a term the interviewee used to refer to Lebanese who want to attack Palestinians) who attack us here in Lebanon. We need to draw attention to their actions and remember what they have done to us. I can also say that I still feel anger towards Ariel Sharon for his role. I want him to suffer for as long as possible.

## AMNEH SARRIS, 50

I was twenty or twenty one at the time, and I remember I had just started working at Gaza Hospital as a nurse.

On the Thursday (16<sup>th</sup> September), I had been at work and I didn't realise anything was happening. I went home in the evening after work and headed back into Shatila from the hospital. On the Friday morning I went to work as usual.

My friend, who was also a nurse, slept at Acre Hospital on the other side of the camp because she felt it was safer.

During the day on Friday, people were coming to the hospital from different parts of the camp to say that slaughters were taking place, that whole families and households were being killed. I heard that four elders from the camp had decided to go and speak with the Israelis at the camp entrance to inform them that no guerrillas were present in the camp. They were not heard from again.

I remember seeing an injured girl in the middle of the street. When people tried to reach her, snipers shot at them. I saw one person killed trying to reach her. We were very busy with lots of people coming to the hospital throughout the day – many seeking refuge. They thought that they would be safe.

We could see militiamen from the hospital – they were around all day.

In the afternoon, as more people arrived at the hospital, the Head of Nursing told them that she couldn't guarantee their safety. She instructed people to start leaving and even told us nurses to change out of our uniforms and go back home. We had to leave for our own safety.

From the hospital I went to stay with a friend in Basta.<sup>7</sup> It was only when I returned to the camp on the Saturday morning that I saw Israeli troops for the first time. Luckily, when the trouble started, my family had moved outside the camp and they were at least 1km away.

At the time I felt very vulnerable, then and for years afterwards, because there weren't many young men around the camp. At the time, most of them had left or were too young. At least now there are people around to protect us.

Only the Palestinians are protecting us. We are not welcomed by the Lebanese or protected by any part of the Lebanese state. We are still an isolated community, just as we were then, but now we are at least better able to protect ourselves.

Many sieges of the camp followed the massacres during the rest of the civil war, so we never really had any peace in which to think about what had happened. The massacre is still very much alive in my memory, but so are so many other events that have happened since then.

## ITFIKAR KHALIFEH, 73

We were living in the Western quarter of the camp. I was just over 40 and my husband was 65. We had 6 girls and a boy in our family at that time.

While we were trying to get to safety, I got separated from the rest of my family and I had my youngest daughter with me. I saw my husband, Mohammad Khalifeh, shot in the head by a militia man who was shouting at us in Arabic. He told me that he would shoot me too, but then a soldier came from a nearby building. He was speaking Hebrew and told me to leave the place. I could remember some Hebrew from the village where I grew up, as there were Jews living there. He pointed a gun at the militant until I got away.

I couldn't tell my children that I'd seen that their father had been shot and killed.

My son, who was 21 at the time, left for Denmark during the War of the Camps.<sup>8</sup> He now has a family and children.



<sup>7</sup> Neighbourhood in Beirut

<sup>8</sup> The War of the Camps took place from 1985-1987 and consisted in a number of sieges of some Beirut and southern camps by Lebanese militias.



## JAMEELEH KHALIFEH (DAUGHTER OF ITFIKER), 46



I was 16. It started on the Thursday evening. I saw armed men start to enter the camp from the direction of the Kuwaiti embassy, so our family escaped to the neighbourhood shelter. I remember that light bombs were falling at the time and there was shooting going on as well.

At that point I was with my mother, five sisters, my brother and my father. People wanted to leave the shelter under a white flag to show that they were unarmed and when there was a call to surrender made over loud speakers, we went out into the street. I saw Israeli soldiers alongside militiamen, so we tried to take a different route to avoid them. But it seems we were between two groups who were closing in on us.

The last thing I remember about my dad was holding his hand and trying to find a different path away from the militias. When the shooting started everyone fled in different directions and I lost track of everyone in my family. Armed men were trying to gather everyone together, but I was able to slip away.

I headed deeper into the camp. When I reached a mosque, I tried to tell the people there that a massacre was taking place but people didn't believe it was possible. I carried on heading towards Gaza Hospital and got there later that night. There was sniper fire on the way.

I spent the night at Gaza Hospital. We were able to find one another at the hospital on the Thursday night. I remember seeing my mother who insisted that our dad had been taken prisoner. This wasn't true. She had seen him shot in the head, but she didn't want to scare us or make the situation worse. She was distressed.

The next morning the shooting got closer and closer to the hospital. There were lots of people and nurses there at the time, but with the increased shooting more and more injured people were coming in. People were getting scared and those who could leave started to do so.

We started taking the route to Barbir<sup>9</sup>, but the Israeli soldiers on the way started trying to separate women and children from the men. People started to become scared again and the crowd tried to disperse. On Friday night, we were able to sleep in a school building outside the camp. There was no sympathy from other locals; if we tried to hide in doorways they would come and kick us out.

We spent Saturday in a mosque outside the camp, but were told we couldn't stay there. On Sunday we were eventually able to take a taxi to Dahiye<sup>10</sup> and stay with a relative of my mother.

There were announcements on the Saturday that men should surrender at Sports City. I remember that old men came back with Star of David stamps on their IDs to say that they'd been checked, but many said that young men who went didn't come back.

I am the only one left here in Lebanon with my mother. I have a sister in Dubai, two in Jordan and one went to Egypt, who I've not seen in almost 30 years. My brother, who was 21 at the time of the massacre, left for Denmark during the War of the Camps. He is now married with children; we all have our own families. If I ever meet my brothers and sisters it has to be outside Lebanon, so we go to Jordan or Dubai.

I still feel angry that no-one has been punished on the Lebanese or the Israeli side. I think that justice needs to be done.

Every year when it comes to the commemoration of the massacres, I feel tired and stressed from thinking about it, talking about it and reliving what happened without any justice. I took part in the Belgian case. I was interviewed and I spoke to a delegation at the UNESCO building when they came to Lebanon. I even spoke at a conference that marked the 25th anniversary, five years ago.

Yet things for Palestinians haven't improved. In fact, I think they're worse. Generally I am grateful to the Lebanese for allowing us to shelter in their country, to live among them. But there is no sympathy from most groups or parties. I have children of my own now. My two sons, 19 and 20, work in manual jobs in factories and I hope for a better future for them with more rights than we have now, but I can't see how.

Every year there are commemorative events and I attend with Beit Atfal A-Sommoud.<sup>11</sup> I think it's very important to have such events, to maintain the struggle, hope for justice and to let visitors and outsiders know what happened to us and how the killings happened.



IMAGE: Site of the Sabra and Shatila Memorial and Mass Grave

## HALA SALOUN, 18

*Note: Hala is not a survivor but is a grandchild of one of the survivors. She has grown up in an environment where the loss of her uncle and aunt was highly prominent – their pictures adorned the wall of the living room.*

I have heard all about the massacre from my mother and grandmother, both of whom were survivors.

The first response is always anger. Questions come to my mind about why they were killed. My aunt and uncle and other people had done nothing to deserve what happened. The other question is why they were killed in this way – murdered and mutilated.

Every two weeks we visit the grave of my family members who died. I think it's important to remember and respect the people who died, but also important to remember those who survived. To remember their cause and what they've had to live with since the massacres – the loss, the pain, the injustice.

As a Palestinian in Lebanon I still feel like an outsider, even though my grandmother is Lebanese. Lebanon is not my country, so I hope to return to Palestine one day as I don't belong here.



## MOHAMMAD SROUR, 50



I was 20 years old. I can remember that it really started on the Thursday. Beforehand, the Israelis had set up checkpoints at the Kuwaiti Embassy and Acre Hospital, outside the camp and in the surrounding streets. People had been down to talk to them to see what the situation was, and they had been told that things were okay. The relationship was tense, but it was a normal interaction between the people of the camps and soldiers from outside.

At 5.45pm on the Thursday, I saw men wearing the uniform of the Lebanese Army come into the camp and start to ask about named individuals. They came to certain parts of the camp and were identifying houses they said were owned or used by Palestinian terrorists – but the people of these neighbourhoods told them that this wasn't true.

Later that evening, I was at home with my family. We also had people staying with us from the south, so there were around 40 people at my house watching the funeral of Bachir Gemayal.

My house was on the very edge of the camp and we could see fighters going past the window. It wasn't easy to move around during this time, as there was lots of sniper fire and there were tanks at the edges of the camp too. Some Palestinians were taking shots at the tanks and in retaliation the Israelis destroyed a warehouse belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

When the fighting first started all the young men left my house and I went with them. We thought we would be the

ones that the army wanted to take. As I entered the camp I was spotted. A militiaman shouted at me to stop and I was fired upon. Everyone scattered.

That night I went to Gaza Hospital to seek refuge. There were already a lot of people hiding there, but we had no idea what was happening. I spent the night there.

On the Friday morning, I went out of the camp to get breakfast with my cousin. As I was returning, I was stopped by a man from the camp who asked me where I was going and what I was doing out. He told me of a man and his whole family who had been killed in their house during the night. In fact, he was talking to me about my father and my family.

I went straight back to Gaza Hospital and when I got there I was able to find my mother. She was injured and she couldn't speak. She was just crying. I found out what had happened. During the night, my brother had gone to the roof of the house to see what was happening and the militiamen had spotted him. The militia came to our front door and demanded they be let in, and my father tried to reason with them. He offered them money to leave the family alone. They agreed and told him to fetch the money, but when he opened the door to give it to them they forced their way in. They told the family to line up on the other side of the room and as they did so the militiamen opened fire. Most of the family were killed straight away. Two of my brothers hid in the toilet. My mother and sister were both injured but survived by pretending to be dead. The youngest member of my family was 16 months old. She was shot as she crawled across the floor to reach my brothers, who were silently beckoning to her.

My sister was unable to move because of her injuries and they had to leave her at the house until Saturday. She told me that the militias were going from house to house throwing in grenades to kill the wounded. She only survived because they believed everyone in our house was already dead.

The events are still very clear in my mind and in my memory. As I describe what happened it feels as though I am reliving it, seeing everything before my eyes as it happened.

I have been suffering with the memories since it happened. But not only the memories, the need for assistance that comes from the loss of so much of my family.

I still don't trust other communities in Lebanon or the international community. Palestinians in Lebanon have been isolated by external factors and other groups still portray us as criminals, terrorists and outsiders.

I still feel deserted by those who were outside. They all left us to face this alone.

## SAMIHA HIJAZEH, 74

I am Lebanese. I was married to a Palestinian man and all my children and family are Palestinian too. We were living in Tal el Zaatar and my husband was killed there, so my children and I came to Shatila.

*Samiha lost her home and husband when Tal el Zaatar camp was destroyed. Then she lost her son and daughter at Sabra and Shatila. After that, there was heavy fighting in the part of the camp<sup>12</sup> where she lives during the War of the Camps.*

I was 44. My house was in the Austrian Kindergarten Quarter. The neighbourhood was named after the Kindergarten where I worked. On the Thursday night, I was at the neighbourhood shelter with my neighbours. I was with my daughter at the shelter, but there was also my daughter Zainab who was newly married and Ali, my son who was 12.

I was worried about Zainab who was living on the other side of the camp in the Western quarter. It was night time when I heard the first serious shooting and light bombs going off. I wanted to see what was happening so I left the shelter, despite what my neighbour said. On the way to the main street, I saw a lot of dead bodies who'd been killed in the shooting. I came across a neighbour, Mustafa, who had been shot and injured. Me and another neighbour were able to drag him back to the shelter where we stayed the night. There were 25-30, families and children staying there.

We were able to take Mustafa to Gaza Hospital and I was able to get out of the camp to a school in Tariq al Jdeideh<sup>13</sup>.

On the Saturday I went up to my daughter's house. She wasn't there but I saw her neighbour. His whole family had been killed and I started to get a very bad feeling. I had heard that detainees were being taken to the Sports City stadium so I headed up there. I found a mass grave nearby with 21 people in it. I recognised some of them. The grave contained the bodies of my daughter, Zainab, her husband, Fahad, and my son, Ali. I remember that Zainab's face had been burned by what looked like chemicals or acid. Fahad's body had been chopped completely in half at the waist. My son was at his sister's house and I was supposed to join them. The only reason I didn't was because the shooting started so I went to the shelter instead.



I prefer to keep the memory of what happened. I don't want to forget and I don't want people to forget. Ali was only 12 years old. I am still very upset about his death. When I think about it, I can only think of one question: What had he done to the Israelis, to the Lebanese, to deserve this?

It's important to me that people talk about it, however painful it is. It is important that people hear about what happened so that it's not forgotten.

I sometimes see a friend of Ali's around the camp. When I see him as a grown man I wonder what my son would have been like by that age and the injustice of having him taken away. I wish that I could have the chance to avenge his killing. I hope that those who created that sense of loss and pain in me have to feel it for themselves some day.

I was able to return to work at the kindergarten after the massacre and worked there up until a month ago. Life goes on, but it hasn't taken away the painful memories. When we left Tal el Zaatar we were completely abandoned, I had to go looking for assistance for my survival and that of my children. Nothing erases the memory of that shame.



## SAMIR ZREIN, 42 (middle son of Baheeja Zrein)

Early on the Saturday morning we were at the end of our road when we saw four armed men with a white flag calling people into the camp. I stayed with my uncle for the whole time and we went towards the entrance of the camp.

People were going calmly to the camp. It didn't seem as though there was anything seriously wrong at this point. There were no signs of a massacre. As we entered we saw more armed men on the rooftops and some came down and moved among the group. They made us sit on the ground. I was there for around an hour before my mum found us again and during that time more and more people were brought to the camp.

There was not much interaction or communication, but we started to get worried when we heard them speaking in a Lebanese accent and I could tell that my uncle was more concerned. He told my elder brother to go to the guard and try to convince them to let him go home to get his mother (even though she was already there). The idea was to get a message out to people to warn them about what was happening. The guard didn't allow him, so we tried with my youngest brother. He was told not to worry, that the militia would be bringing his whole family to the camp. He was pushed over and the man aimed and readied his rifle to shoot, so my brother ran back to where we were.

They wanted to scare and humiliate us. They took people at random, took them behind a sand barrier and we heard shooting. Then they made us applaud, clap, even laugh. This happened with three or four different groups. I don't know why they picked out the people that they did and I don't understand why they made us applaud or laugh. It was just for our humiliation and their fun.

Inside there was more of a system. We were taken in and there were informants pointing out 'suspects' to the Israeli soldiers. They were then taken away, I don't know where to. An informant pointed out a 'suspected person' in a blue shirt and the soldier came into the crowd, but there was more than one man wearing a blue shirt including my uncle. The soldier took him, although it was a mistake. He was taken away by car and we never saw him again. My other uncle had managed to escape before we got to Sports City.

The memories are still very fresh, even after all this time. I wish that I could go back and do something, do something to stop what happened or do something to avenge it. I was powerless at the time. We were powerless and unprotected. Afterwards I just wanted the chance to be able to go back and stop it all.

I tell my children about the massacre because it is an important part of the Palestinians' history in Lebanon. However, the situation afterwards went from bad to worse, with the sieges of the camp and the fighting with Amal. Even now the Palestinians are blamed for everything or we are used and exploited by different outside groups in their political games.



## THE SITUATION TODAY



*Olfat Mahmoud of the 'Palestinian Women's Humanitarian Organisation' (PWHO) spoke with MAP about the situation for Palestinians in Lebanon today and people's hope for the future.*

Today Palestinians in Lebanon are very worried by the events in neighbouring Syria. The fact that there have been numerous massacres in Syria has brought back painful memories of what happened in Sabra and Shatila thirty years ago. The anniversary should be an occasion to send a message to the world that we continue to live as refugees in a country that does not want us here.

In the shadow of the Arab Spring, refugees in Lebanon feel forgotten by the international community. We've dropped down the international agenda since the signing of the Oslo accords, with people focused on the West Bank and Gaza. However the Arab Spring has made a difference and people are happy to see democracy elsewhere. Even in the camps there has been a change with people talking about their rights and taking action.

The anniversary of this tragic massacre should be an occasion for people across the world to demand our rights as human beings and, most importantly of all, our right to return home.



IMAGE: Olfat Mahmoud, Bourj el Bourajneh, Lebanon





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