

I had to share this incredibly inspirational story from the Guardian of London. First, though, here's the story on Beit Hanoun that's in the Nov. 8 Bay View:



(photo on left) Palestinian women marched right into Israeli tank fire, which killed two and injured 10, in a daring rescue of their men from a besieged mosque. Photo: Suhaib Salem, Reuters

(photo on right) Palestinian women marched Friday to serve as human shields so their men could escape from a mosque besieged by the Israeli army in Beit Hanoun. Photo: AP

'They shoot anyone that moves'

Young Palestinian tells of brutal siege, brave resistance in Beit Hanoun

by Silvia Cattori

"Beit Hanoun, with 30,000 inhabitants, has been the target of daily aggressions and air strikes since June 25," a young Palestinian began, telling his story in a near whisper. "It is now besieged by Israeli troops. We have seen the tanks advance and take up their positions.

"We are now encircled by about 70 tanks and at least 450 soldiers who announce that the city is a 'closed military zone.' That means that no one can leave. No one can flee. It is an offensive based on those carried out in the West Bank in 2002.

"We have no water, no electricity. We hide in the remote corners of our houses. Ambulances are not authorized to enter into this occupied and closed zone. The soldiers have circled the houses they want to invade.

"They occupied the houses and they shut up the families in one room. Now they are using them as forts. They use explosives to pierce holes in the walls, they blow off doors, and the people are terrified. They shoot anyone that moves.

"Yesterday they fired on people that were seeking shelter, who were not armed, who were not in fighting positions. They shot them in the back. And when one was wounded and wanted to flee, they killed him.

"Those who wanted to collect his body were targets as well. In numerous cases, ambulances couldn't go to the aid of the wounded. Children who slip out from their parent's watch or that look out the windows are killed by Israeli soldiers positioned on the roofs and balconies of the houses they occupy.

"They have the green light from Bush to kill us, and from those politicians that affirm that Israel 'has the right to defend itself.' They use arms that transform the dead and wounded into something monstrous.

"The wounds provoked by the missiles launched from the drones are very impressive. They are like razor cuts – the legs, the feet, the hands all cleanly cut. They are as horrifying as wounds from an M-16. The soldiers have orders to shoot at the upper body. They aim at the chest, near the heart, the head.

"The victims are mostly civilians, killed or wounded in the throat, the neck, the chest, the head, even though they were in their houses. They shoot at people running in fear, who are trying to save themselves.

"We have lost any notion of time; we have no idea how long we have been caught in this war. We feel lost. There are planes that bomb us, drones ready to fire their missiles over our heads. They control the entire zone. With the droning of the drones, we always have the feeling of having a bee buzzing in our ears. It is really disturbing.

"There is no one to defend us. We don't have an army. We have only our parents to defend us, knowing that they are going to their deaths and that they cannot defend us. This new aggression is horrible, especially for the children who are very numerous here. They are forced to stay couped up inside, they are terrorized, and they cry when there are bombings.

“At any moment we can learn there are people killed, there are people wounded who are bathed in their own blood, that people don’t know how to stop the hemorrhaging, and that the ambulances can’t give them any aid without being hampered.

“The Israelis say they are waging this offensive to prevent the entry of arms from Egypt. That is false. Nothing can enter. In Gaza, there are only rifles that can do nothing against the Apache helicopters and the Merkava tanks of the Israeli army.

“The only arms of war in Gaza are those delivered by Israel and the United States to Dahlan, who is Abu Mazen’s man, the most feared man in Gaza. He is at the head of the forces that have, for months now, created the troubles to topple the Hamas government.

“Yesterday, through their loudspeakers the soldiers summoned all the young men 15 years and older to leave their houses. Then, sector by sector, they searched the houses and brought them out, handcuffed, and took them to a place where they certainly forced them to strip, as they did in Betlaha in June.

“They leave the men in their underwear. For an Oriental, it is the worst of humiliations. They might as well kill us.

“We think that after Beit Hanoun, they will attack Betlaha, and then Jabaliya and do what they have done here: search house by house. Beit Hanoun is like Rafah; both are very vulnerable zones because they are geographically separated from other inhabited areas. They are therefore easy to isolate from the rest of Gaza.

Palestinian women march under fire to free their men

“This morning, the women went out to come to the aid of their sons or husbands threatened by the armored cars that encircled the Mosque. The women defied the Apaches and the armored vehicles.

“For us, it was a tremendous moment. We felt like we were wrapped up in a veil of humanity. It was very moving to see these women ready to die to save their sons and husbands. They continued on without hesitation, and the soldiers, who hadn’t expected this, were disoriented.

“Because of this effect of surprise, they succeeded, saving the lives of these fighters. They demonstrated that people with empty hands could defeat the largest army in the world. We took it as a message to the men of the Arab countries who remain silent.

“These women said, by their gesture, ‘There, in the face of your cowardice, Palestinian women by themselves are in the process of fighting for the release of their men who are besieged by the enemies of the Arabs, Israel.’”

The young Palestinian who recounted this story in a low voice breaks our heart. He could render no greater homage to these heroic women. I think that everyone who saw the images of these women was shaken.

The women threw themselves down the long avenue, uncovered, empty handed, defying the helicopters and the armored vehicles, in order to protect their men. The soldiers fired on them, but the women continued and arrived at their goal. The soldiers who were firing from the armored vehicles on these harmless women are monsters.

“Israel has the right to defend itself,” responded the former ambassador Elie Barnavi to a journalist from France Culture Friday morning when asked about the meaning of the Israeli offensive in the north of Gaza. The right to defend themselves against what? There is no Palestinian army facing them. There is only a people being massacred day after day by the best equipped army in the world. And the Palestinians don’t have the right to defend themselves.

They are making war on civilians and the world doesn’t know

It is to the Palestinian people, the victims of the massacres, that we should be asking what it means to live under the Israeli military offensive, and not to ambassadors of the Jewish State of Israel, ambassadors who will never tell you, when it comes to Arab lives, of the suffering and anxiety of children thrown into the dreadful chaos, of the women who have no idea how to protect them, of the elderly who impotently submit, of babies wailing, of pregnant women who fear for their unborn children, of the wounded, the dead, the mothers who cry for their men, who feel humiliated that they cannot defend their children, the doctors who can no longer support the rivers of blood and the wounded added to the wounded in their poorly equipped hospitals.

These “terrorists,” these “activists” that Israel is fighting, these are Palestinians, the authentic residents of the nation that Israel wiped off the map. These are women of all ages who brave the tanks to protect their sons. These are children who die in their beds or playing by the front door. These are fathers, brothers, cousins and spouses summarily executed because Israel has put them on their “wanted” lists.

These are desperate young people who, to defend their dignity, have only rifles and rudimentary rockets, and who know full well that they are going to their deaths when they put their nose outside. Like the child Bara' Riyad Fayyad, 4 years old, killed on Thursday in front of the door of her house. These are normal people who voted democratically against the corrupt authorities of Fatah.

"Where are our Arab brothers?" cries a Palestinian in front of a camera.

Yes, where is the world? The "international community" says nothing, say shocked people who watch all of this with horror and don't understand the silence. But the "international community," so often invoked, is only an empty word. The U.N., ever since the fall of the USSR, is nothing but an instrument in the hands of the U.S. superpower.

In fact, the "international community" is us, all of us. It is the associations that are unfortunately more attached to protecting the Jewish State of Israel than defending the right of existence of the Palestinians and their right to return to their rightful home. It is the political parties of every tendency, too preoccupied by their electoral success. It is our elected officials who don't dare criticize Israel out of fear of being accused of anti-Semitism. It is the journalists who misinform public opinion and cover up the crimes of state.

Editor's note: Videos of the attack on the women of Beit Hanoun can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWDu7p9rsXU&eurl=> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcQIAWo45No&mode=related&search=>. Tell the White House to stop the massacres in Beit Hanoun and throughout Palestine by signing a letter at http://www.democracyinaction.org/dia/organizationsORG/CFLWeb/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=5863.

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