

“Personifying the national disaster”, Muhammad Aatef Khatib, 27/8/2025

Introduction

Ido Shahar: So again, good afternoon. We are in another meeting of *Eyes on Gaza*, whose purpose is, as always, a combined one: both to learn and better understand what is happening, and also to oppose the current reality and the criminal policy that the government and the army are advancing. Today we wish to draw attention to a silenced subject that receives almost no reference in the media and in public discourse in Israel. As all of us surely know, many Palestinians who are citizens of Israel have first-degree relatives in Gaza. Therefore, the colossal disaster, almost of biblical proportions, that is now taking place in the Gaza Strip, is not abstract at all for them. It has names and faces and bodies in flesh and blood, of beloved family members who are threatened and in danger, or hurt, murdered or injured, and suffering from the famine. Today we wish to hear the words of Muhammad Aatef Khatib, a young man as you can see, born in Jaffa, son of a mother from Jaffa and a father from Gaza. Sadly, his father was killed there about two months ago while trying to obtain food for his family. We are deeply grateful to Muhammad who agreed to talk with us and share with us the story of his father and himself. And what we will do today, in a certain sense similar to the conversation that took place on Sunday [“Personal Testimony” a conversation with Manwa al-Masri, resident of Gaza City, 24/8/2025], is a kind of interview with guiding questions. I will direct questions to Mohammad for about eight minutes, and afterwards we will open the discussion to questions from the audience in the chat. So again thank you, Muhammad, for agreeing to speak with us.

Conversation

Ido: Maybe just in a few words tell us briefly some background about yourself and the family.

Muhammad: I’m Mohammad, I’m from Jaffa, I’m 23 years old. I have an older sister, two younger brothers who are twins. I was born in Jaffa. I grew up with my father until the age of nine. My father is from Gaza. He came here at the age of 15 before the Intifada. He lived here, married my mother. They fought for nine years to get him an Israeli identity card. In the end when they divorced, he was imprisoned and then deported him to Gaza. From then on there was [for us] only phone contact. There wasn’t really any kind of physical meeting between me and him.

Ido: So you continued to be in contact, but mainly through the phone, and maybe later also through the internet or WhatsApp. Where did they live in Gaza?

Muhammad: In the Tuffah neighborhood.

Ido: In the Tuffah neighborhood which is one of the neighborhoods of Gaza City itself. And your father married there in Gaza. I understand there are two younger siblings who were born?

Muhammad: Yes, I have two younger siblings. I have a seven-year-old sister whose name is Nur, and I have another brother who is nine years old whose name is Abed. And both of them are there now, with what is left of the family.

Ido: And what can you tell us, as far as you know and are aware, about what has been happening with them after the seventh of October, when Israel begins the war?

Muhammad: After the seventh of October, they went into panic about what was going to happen in the war and how long it was going to last. They were used to wars of three–four months. They did not think that this was really a war that was going to last so long. Two–three months after the war started they received evacuation orders to the south. They lived in tents, in schools, in hospitals, wherever they could live, also in abandoned houses. Every few months they had to pack their things again and leave everything. Each time they took less and less things with them. They had to choose what would really help them later, and what really was not important.

Ido: And the family all stayed together, meaning your father and his new wife and the children?

Muhammad: Yes, with the uncles and with my grandmother and my grandfather. Later in the war, also part of the family, apart from my father, they too died in the war.

Ido: That means other family members were killed?

Muhammad: Yes.

Ido: And their house in the Tuffah neighborhood still stands or was it bombed?

Muhammad: Destroyed, bombed.

Ido: And where are they today?

Muhammad: Today they are also in the area of the Tuffah neighborhood, also in Gaza City. There is great fear about what is going to happen, about the plan for the conquest of Gaza City. They are afraid of the time when the evacuation order will come, that they will have to move again. They are really afraid of what is going to happen, both hunger and fear, and also no hope. It is very hard.

Ido: What can you tell about the circumstances in which your father was killed?

Muhammad: My father went to look for food in one of the abandoned houses. He did not go to the GHF aid centers, because it seemed to him too dangerous to go there for food, more chance of dying than of actually getting the food. And he just entered an area where there was a tank. Then the soldiers received an order to bomb the building where he was hiding. They bombed the building, and only a week later his relatives were able to find him and take out his body. For a week he was missing. They found his body after a week.

Ido: And you were in contact the whole time?

Muhammad: Yes, the whole time, in weekly conversations.

Ido: With the family members, with your father and with the family members and the younger siblings? Is there any way that you can help them, support them?

Muhammad: There are people here I know who also have some kind of contacts with the Red Cross who can indeed give them assistance when there will be. But right now there really isn't assistance.

Ido: Do you know if right now they are really suffering from hunger or are they still more...

Muhammad: Yes, they are suffering from hunger. Just yesterday I spoke with my relative. I asked him what the situation was, and he told me: "We really need everything. Whatever it may be, just bring us. Even pots, if there are pots that can be brought to cook food in. We don't have flour, and we don't have pots."

Ido: If you can share with us accessible materials from there?

Muhammad: Yes, I will check.