

free Gaza!

In solidarity with the people of Gaza

Tuesday 6/01/08

Jan 5 night shift/ UNRWA refuge schools attacked

8pm: I am due at Al Quds hospital for a Red Crescent shift at 8pm, but as I am finishing up writing with the seaside apartment's generated electricity, the strangest noise arrives from the sea. It is a whooshing sound like a rocket coming very close; V and I look at each other, look at the seaside window - he pulls his cap lower and leans away from the window, I put my jacket over my head so I can't see what happens. But instead of finishing with an explosion, the sound decreases again into the distance.

It is then repeated several times, and I realise what we are hearing is not rockets, but planes - very loud and incredibly fast, making me think of the term supersonic, if that even means anything outside of comics. I set off to walk the half hour dark route to Al Quds hospital, but am only half way up the hill when more planes speed over, and explosions start between me and the hospital. I completely lose my nerve, stopping still under a tree and texting Eva that I can't do this walk by myself. The planes have freaked her out as well. I walk quickly back to the apartment, and try to work out what to do. V suggests I walk the other direction, to Al Shifa hospital, and catch an ambulance shuttling to Al Quds.

What is with these planes? This little bit of land doesn't even have a proper army! The term "overkill" has never had more meaning. It takes me some time to get up the courage to set off again, luckily the wierd planes have gone.



10.45 I am still at Al Shifa, having been waylaid by a Press TV reporter wanting to do an interview, but I've got into an ambulance ready to head off. Just as it is about to leave, rockets fall either side of the hospital and we retreat hurriedly back under the entrance shelter.

By the time we get to Al Quds the atmosphere is hectic. They have just received three men who were in a car outside a bombed house, I am not clear if one is dying or already dead. We rush another of them to Al Shifa for neurosurgery. Then we are sent off at high speed to emergency calls, through a darkened city full of smoke. Double strikes by Israel happen so often now that the ambulance workers' stress levels are very high; the medics are doing everything at top speed and shouting at the tops of their voices as they do it. Rubble covers the streets from strikes minutes ago. The familiar smell of rocket fire fills the air, the same smell the grey dead men give off whom we have collected in the last days.

free Gaza!

In solidarity with the people of Gaza

Friday 2/01/08

We peer into the darkness for someone watching for us; we spot a young boy who runs back around the corner. He returns with his family, 25 of them, mostly terrified young children. One boy is hopping. The medics run to grab them, shouting what must be the equivalent of "Move, we've got to get out of here!" Everyone is shoved into ambulances; a girl of about six is posted through the half open window into my arms. We tear back to the hospital, offloading them into comparative shelter, racing back to collect a father with his daughter of about 8 in his arms, a head trauma case.

Later, I go to see the family of 25, gathered in a room where they have been given blankets and food. There don't appear to be any serious injuries, though when I hear more that seems a miracle. I ask two articulate and beautiful teenage English speakers from the family, R and S, what their story is. They explain half the family is their aunt and her children, who came to their house because their own was destroyed. R says - "in the last 3 nights, we were hit 13 times the first night, 3 times the next, and tonight 10 times. The 3rd floor was gone, then the second floor, we were just left in the first floor, now there is almost nothing." They translate the aunt's words to me - "What is the solution for us? What?" The girls add, "We had no solution from Fatah. No solution from Hamas. We just want peace! Just peace!"

"Where will you go?" I ask them.

"We don't know." they say. "We have some other family but they left their house too because Israel threatened to bomb it. We don't know."

I hear from E that she was borrowing internet in the Sharuch building tonight, which houses Russia TV, Fox, possibly Reuters, and other press offices, when it was struck 7 times one after the other. She got safely to the ground from the tenth floor, with everyone else, but she says she did think the whole place was going to collapse.

There is confused news through the night of more attacks on mosques and homes throughout Gaza. After the hectic earlier hours, the middle part of the shift is filled by collecting 5 women going into labour; by the 5th call S thinks his dispatcher is

joking. I am pleased to be able to smile at our patients. Then S tells me about a 17 year old woman who went into labour yesterday. Her sister-in-law's 1 year old was killed in the last days in her arms, the bullet continuing on to wound the mother. And her father-in-law is dead, but his body has not been able to be collected.

4am: Behind the two reception desks opposite each other are two families sitting on plastic chairs put in a circle. They are silent. A medic explains that the residential building behind us here at Al Quds has had a bomb threat. These families have evacuated to us here. Others remain in the building.

6am: I speak to EJ in Jabalia on the office phone. I forgot to tell you that the Red Crescent Ambulances again relocated their base, since there was a concern that Karmel Adwan hospital as a government hospital might be a target. So EJ, Mo, and A have done the night shift from the new base of Al Awda hospital. EJ says that at about 5am, 4 ambulances went to collect wounded from a house attack. They returned to get further wounded, again in a convoy of 4, and the Israeli army shelled the house for a second time as soon as they arrived. The medics outside the vans were injured by flying rubble. EJ was inside.

S tells me there was an attack on the Shatr UNWRA School, by Apache he thinks, which killed three UNWRA volunteers helping with the refugees. He is asked to take the ambulance to collect the body parts, as they are near the bathrooms which is distressing for people. But the RC boss says his is the only ambulance on standby so he must wait til others return first.

5pm: We just heard in the last hour that the Al Fakhoura UNWRA School was shelled, we think by tanks, and it is confirmed that 43 members of the same extended family were killed. The UNWRA Schools are sheltering refugees whose homes Israel has already bombed or threatened to bomb. We have also heard a third UNWRA school was attacked earlier but we have no further details yet. I cannot express the anger I am feeling right now.

Our group is holding together but we are feeling the increasing strain of not enough internet access, food, sleep, or hope for an end to this insanity. The numbers of dead have exceeded 570 and the injured have exceeded 2,600.