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Listen: "Clearly marked" Gaza medics shot by Israeli snipers

https://soundcloud.com/intifada/clearly-marked-gaza-medics-shot-by-israeli-snipers

"We could see very quickly that the Israelis were going to shoot a lot of people," Tarek Loubani, a Palestinian Canadian emergency physician who treated patients in Gaza on 14 May, told The Electronic Intifada Podcast.

As Israeli forces began to shoot into the crowds, the number of Palestinians wounded in their limbs climbed. Loubani said that his paramedic team "ran out of our supply of tourniquets really early in the morning. All we had left were eight of them."

After he retrieved more tourniquets and returned to distribute them to paramedics, he said there was a lull around him: "No burning tires, no smoke, no tear gas, nobody messing around in front of the buffer zone. Just a clearly marked medical team well away from everybody else."

"And unfortunately that's when I got shot."

An Israeli sniper shot him with a bullet that penetrated both legs, as he stood near Gaza's eastern perimeter during the Great March of Return protests.

He was one of 18 paramedics who were shot and injured on that day alone, according to reports.

One of them, Mousa Jaber Abu Hassanein, was killed. Abu Hassanein and Loubani were part of the same medical team working in the field.

According to Loubani, four members of his team, including himself and Abu Hassanein, were shot that day – mostly in the lower limbs.

Loubani was wearing hospital scrubs and Abu Hassanein and the others were wearing orange vests, clearly identifying them as a medics.

They were working as part of a team stationed in an area about 25 meters from the perimeter fence, Loubani said.

"We huddled there because we knew we would otherwise get in the crossfire" of the Israeli snipers, he added.

But he was shot. Loubani said that it was "very hard to believe that the sniper didn't know who he was targeting."

Low medical supplies

Loubani has been working with Gaza-based physicians and designers to mitigate the overwhelming lack of basic medical supplies and electricity to operate hospitals and treat patients, as Israel and Egypt continue the 11-year blockade.

He was in Gaza to join medical teams and test tourniquets that he helped design using open-source technology and 3D printers.

Gaza's health ministry reported that 62 Palestinians had been killed and almost 3,200 injured by Israeli forces in the territory on 14 May, as Israeli forces opened fire on tens of thousands of Palestinians during the Great March of Return.

As of 15 May, more than 100 Palestinians, including 12 children, two journalists and paramedic Abu Hassanein had been killed during the protests, which have been held near Gaza's eastern boundary since 30 March.

Abu Hassanein had rescued Loubani and treated his bullet wound.

About an hour later, the Israeli army shot Abu Hassanein in the chest while he tried to attend to a wounded protester.

Loubani believes that if he hadn't been incapacitated by that sniper's bullet to his own legs, he could have treated his friend and possibly saved his life.

"When he went down, all the paramedics hit the deck. And they were able to get to cover behind a rock but they couldn't get him to cover until things calmed down, which took about 20 minutes" – which was too late, Loubani explained.

"He had kids. He was a good paramedic. He was a solid rescuer," Loubani said.

Abu Hassanein died of a treatable condition – tension pneumothorax, a collapsed lung due to the injury, Loubani explained. "I could have fixed it with a Bic pen."

Loubani, in blue scrubs, poses for a photograph with members of his medical team on 11 May. Mousa Abu Hassanein, second from right, was killed on 14 May. (courtesy Tarek Loubani)

More than 12,600 Palestinians have been injured during the seven weeks of protests, most of them requiring hospitalization.

More than 200 paramedics and health workers have been injured while providing treatment to wounded people during the mass demonstrations, reports the United Nations. Thirty-two ambulances were also damaged.

One soldier has been reported lightly wounded – the only Israeli casualty during the protests.

"Creaking to its breaking point"

Loubani told The Electronic Intifada Podcast that he received only light treatment for his bullet wound due to the staggering number of injured people needing emergency medical care in the hospital.

Adding to the pressure of physicians trying to triage the thousands of patients, massive shortages of electricity, supplies and medications have made the situation inside Gaza's hospitals intolerable, Loubani said.

Due to the regular electricity outages, ice – a basic requirement to help treat and heal wounds in a triage situation – is nearly unavailable.

"The Palestinians definitely have the right to healthcare that's being denied through this essentially enforced embargo on medical supplies and medical personnel," Loubani said.

He explained that he has been able to take only over-the-counter painkillers he brought from Canada to treat his pain, since there are little to no analgesic medications available in Gaza.

"Usually, there's a list of about 50 percent of essential medications stock that is unavailable. But now, that's at almost 100 percent," he said.

Everything is in short supply, he said, because even well-designed, well-funded medical systems don't have the resources to deal with the enormous amount of gunshot victims in one day.

"That's not something anyone can deal with, let alone a place that's already creaking to its breaking point," he said.

Tepid response from Canadian prime minister

Meanwhile, Loubani's elected representatives back in Canada have issued some responses to Israel's attacks.

Canada's center-left New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh tweeted Tuesday that he was "outraged" that Loubani was shot by Israeli soldiers.

"Glad he is recovering but how can [Prime Minister] Justin Trudeau remain silent on such indiscriminate violence?" Singh added.

Outraged to learn that Canadian doctor and humanitarian, Tarek Loubani, was shot in Gaza yesterday by IDF soldiers, while providing medical assistance. Glad he is recovering but **how can @JustinTrudeau remain silent on such indiscriminate violence?**

— Jagmeet Singh (@theJagmeetSingh) May 15, 2018

Here's @JustinTrudeau forced to answer a Q on #Gaza: says his concern today is with the victims of the "terrible violence", calls for "de-escalation" of violence in the region, the only way forward is negotiations.

Real question: who does he think caused the violence? #cdnpoli pic.twitter.com/RkNXzmrCAD

— Michael Buecker 🌹 (@mbueckert) May 16, 2018

This week, the NDP itself condemned Israel's "clear violations of international law and human rights" and called on Israel to end the occupation of Palestinians.

The party's youth wing went a step further, urging the Canadian government to apply political and economic sanctions and stop arms sales to Israel.

On Wednesday, Trudeau, a strong ally of Israel, published a statement saying that Canada "deplores and is gravely concerned by the violence in the Gaza Strip" – without mentioning who, exactly, has been perpetrating it.

He added that the government is "appalled" that Loubani is among the wounded.

Trudeau called for an "immediate investigation to thoroughly examine the facts on the ground" and said the government is "engaging with Israeli officials to get to the bottom of these events" but stopped short of any sharp condemnation of Israel's killing and maiming of unarmed protesters.

Canada's foreign minister Chrystia Freeland tweeted on Wednesday that they government is "doing everything we can to help [Loubani], as well as determine how a Canadian was injured."

Thank you, Dr. Tarek Loubani, for taking the time to speak to me this morning. Dr. Loubani was injured Monday in the Gaza Strip. We are doing everything we can to help him, as well as determine how a Canadian was injured. @trklou

— Chrystia Freeland (@cafreeland) May 16, 2018

Anyone who's read reports from @MedicalAidPal @MSF @amnesty @hrw @alhaq_org @AlMezanCenter @btselem knows that evidence of Israeli war crimes in Gaza is overwhelming. So call for international investigation that won't happen just becomes another way to shield Israel from blame.

— Ali Abunimah (@AliAbunimah) May 17, 2018

Activists criticized the Canadian government's diluted responses as well as the Israel lobby's defense of Israel's violence:

Boy, is Chrystia going to be shocked when she finds out

— Michael Bueckert 🌹 (@mbueckert) May 16, 2018

He wasn't "injured" he was shot by Israeli army snipers, along with 1,300 Palestinians. A Canadian was injured because Israeli snipers shot him. Seriously, this is not difficult stuff.

— PSN Edmonton (@psnedmonton) May 16, 2018

Curious to hear @ADL_National explain how Hamas made Israeli snipers shoot a Canadian doctor https://t.co/Y5gSWvjGLf

— IfNotNow 🔥 (@IfNotNowOrg) May 15, 2018

In 2013, Loubani was imprisoned in Egypt for nearly two months along with filmmaker and activist John Greyson.

They were arrested after filming and treating patients shot by Egyptian authorities, who killed hundreds and injured thousands of people during a protest against the army's coup against President Mohammed Morsi.

Listen to the interview with Tarek Loubani via the media player above.

Theme music and production assistance by Sharif Zakout

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