# Murder of Palestinian youth sparks unrest in Jerusalem

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**3 July 2014**

The abduction and murder of a Palestinian teenager early Wednesday morning, apparently a revenge killing carried out by right-wing Israeli settlers, has sparked rioting and direct clashes between Palestinian youth and Israeli security forces.

Muhammad Hussein Abu Khudair, age 16, was grabbed by several men who approached him on the street as he walked from his home to the local mosque for early morning prayers, the usual start of the day for an observant Muslim during Ramadan. Eyewitnesses said the men were Jewish. They shoved him into a dark-colored car and drove away.

The family reported the abduction to the Israeli police. About an hour later, the boy's body was found in another part of the city, Jerusalem Forest, badly burned and bearing other signs of the violence that claimed his life. The father identified his son's body, and this was confirmed by DNA analysis based on samples given by the parents.

The body was taken to Israel's Abu Kabir Forensic Institute for autopsy. It will be released Thursday to the family for an independent autopsy by Palestinian doctors and for burial.

The Khudairs showed reporters a copy of the video footage from a CCTV camera in front of the family's electronics shop showing two of the kidnappers. The original video was seized by Israeli police. Israeli courts have imposed a gag rule on media reports about the details of the crime.

One eyewitness told Israel Radio that Khudair was sitting on a fence outside his house with a group of friends as they waited to go to the mosque for early prayers and a predawn meal before the all-day fast required during Ramadan. Several friends chased the car after Khudair was taken and supplied a description, pictures and a license plate number to the police. "The police know who did this," the eyewitness said.

It is widely believed that the murder of Khudair was carried out as an act of revenge for the killing of three young Israelis who were kidnapped last month as they were hitchhiking on the West Bank. The bodies of Gil-Ad Shaer, Eyal Yifrah and Naftali Fraenkel were buried on Tuesday at a nationally televised service at which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders spoke.

The kidnapping of the three Israeli youth was followed by weeks of vicious attacks throughout the West Bank by Israeli police and troops who were nominally engaged in a search for the missing youth. At least six Palestinians were killed and hundreds arrested.

There have been widespread expressions of fascistic sentiments among the Israeli settlers on the West Bank and from the Zionist ultra-right more generally in the days since the kidnapping and murder of the three youth. A Facebook page calling for violent retribution against any and all Palestinian Arabs has acquired 35,000 members, including so many soldiers that the Israel Defense Forces had to issue a statement that such involvement was prohibited.

On Tuesday, within hours of the funeral, a right-wing mob of several hundred Israeli Jews stormed through parts of Jerusalem, attacking any Palestinian they encountered. Acts of vandalism against Arab-owned shops have been reported in several cities within Israel, usually featuring the slogan "Price Tag," a reference to making all Palestinians pay a price for any acts of violence against Israeli Jews.

When the murder of Muhammad Khudair became public knowledge Wednesday, Palestinian youth took to the streets of the Shuafat and Beit Hanina neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, denouncing violence

by settlers and throwing stones and firecrackers at commuter trains and police vehicles.

Barricades of car bodies and tires were erected to shield the stone throwers from Israeli security forces, who fired rubber bullets and stun grenades. At least 50 people were injured, most of them struck by rubber bullets, and 17 required hospitalization, according to the Red Cross.

There were disturbances in the Old City and police closed off the Temple Mount to Jewish worshippers, citing security concerns.

While a police spokesman claimed that the motive behind the killing of Khudair was unclear and still under investigation, the Jerusalem city council member responsible for East Jerusalem, Meir Margalit of the liberal Meretz Party, told the *Jerusalem Post*, "It's clear that it's revenge. It's a political and terrorist action carried out by the right wing."

A spokesman for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said, "The Israeli government bears responsibility for Jewish terrorism and for the kidnapping and murder in occupied Jerusalem."

In response to the tragic deaths of four young men—three Israelis and one Palestinian—the families of the victims each issued moving statements of considerable dignity and humanity.

The uncle of Naftali Fraenkel, speaking for the family of the Israeli teenager, condemned the murder of Muhammad Khudair. "If indeed an Arab youth has been murdered for nationalistic motive, this is a horrifying, shocking act," he said. "There is no difference in blood. Murder is murder, whatever one's nationality or age. There is no justification, no forgiveness and no atonement for any murder whatsoever."

Hussein Abu Khudair, 48, father of the Palestinian teenager, said he expected no results from the Israeli police investigation. "I am against kidnapping and killing," he said. "Whether Jew or Arab, who would accept that his son or daughter would be kidnapped and killed? I call on both sides to stop the bloodshed."

Suha Khudair, the youth's mother, said bitterly, "We need protection. We are surrounded by lunatic settlers who take our land and now take our children."

These statements are in sharp contrast to the propaganda from Israeli government leaders. The Israeli minister of internal security, Yitzhak Aharonovich, urged Palestinians to "lower the volume" regarding the suspicion of a revenge attack by Jews. "There are attempts to make a connection between the two incidents and we are still checking all directions," he said on Israel Radio. "There are many possibilities, criminal and nationalistic, and everything is being examined in a responsible manner."

The cabinet in which Aharonovich sits has shown no such restraint in its response to the kidnap-murder of the three Israeli youth, vocally denouncing Hamas for committing that crime, although the Islamist group, which rules the Gaza Strip and has widespread support in the West Bank as well, denies responsibility.

Even American media reports, citing Israeli security officials, concede that the killings were carried out by former supporters of Hamas who broke with the organization over its turn away from terrorist attacks on individuals.

That has not stopped the Israeli government from ordering dozens of air strikes on the Gaza Strip, while top Israeli officials have spoken openly of plans to systematically assassinate the entire leadership of Hamas, using the killing of the three youth as a pretext. The Israeli cabinet is reportedly discussing plans for a full-scale invasion of the Gaza Strip.

The most hypocritical statement came from Netanyahu himself at the funeral of the three youth, when he declared, "A broad moral gulf separates us from our enemies. They sanctify death; we sanctify life. They sanctify cruelty and we mercy and compassion. That is the secret of our strength."

For all such claims by Israeli leaders—echoed uncritically by the US media—the state of Israel is responsible for far more killings than any terrorist organization. The death toll from Israeli violence—ranging from torture in prisons to assassination by military death squads to the obliteration of entire villages by bombs and bulldozers—runs to the tens of thousands.