

Teacher, author and activist Dr. Refaat al-Ar'eer murdered in Israeli airstrike

Jacob Crosse
8 December 2023

On December 6, Dr. Refaat al-Ar'eer, a Palestinian author, educator and activist, was reportedly murdered by the US-backed Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in an airstrike that targeted his sister's home in Gaza.

Announcing Dr. al-Ar'eer's death on X/Twitter, Ramy Abdul, chairman of Euro-Med Monitor, a non-profit Europe and Middle East-based human rights organization, said the "assassins targeted, went after and killed the voice of Gaza, one of its best academics, a human, my dear and precious friend Dr. Refaat al-Ar'eer."

Dr. al-Ar'eer was the editor of two books, *Gaza Unsilenced* and *Gaza Writes Back*, the latter a collection of 23 short stories written by young Palestinians who survived the 2008-2009 Israeli military campaign "Operation Cast Lead." An international bestseller, *Gaza Writes Back* was published in 2014 in six different languages.

Dr. al-Ar'eer taught English and poetry at the Islamic University in Gaza.

Muhammad Shehada, chief of communications for Euro-Med Monitor, reported that the December 6 bombing also killed al-Ar'eer's brother, sister and her four children. Shehada, quoting Dr. al-Ar'eer, noted that the December 6 bombing was not the first time the IDF had targeted a familial residence of Dr. al-Ar'eer.

In 2014, Dr. al-Ar'eer said the IDF killed "my brother; it destroyed my apartment when it brought down the family home that housed 40 people. ... Nusayba and I are a perfectly average Palestinian couple. ... We've lost more than 30 relatives."

The targeted killing of Dr. al-Ar'eer, one of thousands of civilians murdered by the Israeli government with the full support of the United States in the last two months, is a heinous war crime that will never be forgotten by the international working class.

Prior to his murder, Dr. al-Ar'eer, a teacher, accomplished writer and Palestinian rights activist, had amassed a substantial following on social media, including under his X/Twitter handle "Refaat in Gaza," where he regularly posted about life under Israeli occupation and the current military siege.

In his last X/Twitter post, al-Ar'eer quoted a December 3 war-mongering video statement from Vice President Kamala Harris and accurately stated: "The Democratic Party and Biden are responsible for the Gaza genocide perpetrated by Israel."

As of this writing, that post has been "liked" over 68,000 times, "retweeted" over 29,000 times and has over 7.3 million "views."

Following his death, journalists from around the world expressed their grief and anger on social media.

Journalist Katie Halper wrote, "This is so upsetting. Oh my god. We spoke to him on our podcast *Useful Idiots*. He was so nice. He was so brave. He spoke to us about how traumatized his children were. When he spoke to us there were bombs going off in the background. Biden this is on you."

Al-Ar'eer and his family are some of the reported 350 Palestinians that have been killed by Israeli military forces in the last 24 hours, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. In what is no doubt an underestimation, the Health Ministry has confirmed that at least 17,177 Palestinians have been killed since October 7.

As the IDF ground operation moves into the south of the Gaza Strip, where some 1.9 million people have been displaced, harrowing images that will be used in future war crimes trials have emerged showing IDF soldiers kidnapping blindfolded and almost entirely naked Palestinian males at gunpoint.

Some of the hostages are being transported to Israeli prisons or, possibly, mass graves. Euro-Med Monitor reported that an eyewitness saw Israeli soldiers shoot seven civilians, one of whom was carrying a white flag, for not following soldiers' humiliating orders to strip themselves fast enough.

While the IDF has claimed that every Palestinian male stripped and kidnapped is a " Hamas fighter," Palestinian Ambassador Husam Zomlot accused the Israeli occupation of kidnapping the Palestinian civilians from a United Nations shelter. Others were reportedly taken from a United Nations school that has been

transformed into a shelter.

While Israel has yet to present a shred of evidence that any of those kidnapped were “ Hamas fighters,” several have already been identified by colleagues, human rights organizations and family members as journalists, United Nations workers and even children.

The images of heavily armed camouflaged soldiers stripping and abusing Middle Easterners evoked immediate comparisons from millions around the world to the torture methods popularized by US imperialism at the turn of the century, including the mass abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and the ongoing torture of alleged “ terrorists” at the Guantanamo Bay military prison.

These latest war crimes have continued to fuel global opposition to the genocide and US imperialism. Protests in countries throughout the world continued on Thursday, including outside weapons manufacturers in Europe and the United States.

On the internet, previous video interviews and articles from Dr. al-Ar’eer have been shared by millions of people, including a 2021 column published in the *New York Times* headlined, “ My child asks, ‘ Can Israel Destroy Our Building if the Power is Out?’ ”

Al-Ar’eer wrote:

On Tuesday, Linah asked her question again after my wife and I didn’t answer it the first time: Can they destroy our building if the power is out? I wanted to say: “ Yes, little Linah, Israel can still destroy the beautiful al-Jawharah building, or any of our buildings, even in the darkness. Each of our homes is full of tales and stories that must be told. Our homes annoy the Israeli war machine, mock it, haunt it, even in the darkness. It can’t abide their existence. And, with American tax dollars and international immunity, Israel presumably will go on destroying our buildings until there is nothing left.”

But I can’t tell Linah any of this. So I lie: “ No, sweetie. They can’t see us in the dark.”

In one of his last interviews from Gaza for *Electronic Intifada*, Dr. al-Ar’eer said, “ We know it is very bleak, very dark. There is no water, there is no way out of Gaza ... what should we do? Drown? Commit mass suicide? Is this what Israel wants? We are not going to do that.

“ I was telling a friend the other day, I am an academic, the

toughest thing I have at home is an Expo marker. But if the Israelis invade, if the paratroopers charge at us and go door to door, to massacre us, I’m going to use that marker to throw it at the Israeli soldiers even if it is the last thing I would be able to do, and this is the feeling of everyone. We are helpless and we have nothing to lose.”

In a digital manifestation of the broad opposition to the Israeli military campaign among workers and youth around the world, since his murder, a poem published by Refaat al-Ar’eer has been viewed over 13 million times and has been retweeted over 65,000 times as of this writing. Accompanying the poem, which is titled “ If I must die,” Dr. al-Ar’eer wrote, “ If I must die, let it be a tale. #FreePalestine #Gaza.” He wrote:

If I must die,
you must live
to tell my story
to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings,
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze-
and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh
not even to himself—
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
if I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact