“Dr. Refaat did not die, he multiplied.”

Thousands mourn Professor Refaat al-Ar’eer at anti-genocide protests and online memorial

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10 December 2023

In the wake of the targeted assassination of Palestinian English Professor Dr. Refaat al-Ar’eer, and the killing of vast numbers of other Palestinians in the ongoing US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, tens of thousands of people continued to protest the slaughter over the weekend.

At several demonstrations, protesters observed moments of silence and paid tribute to the slain professor, who was killed in a targeted airstrike, along with several other members of his family last week.

At demonstrations from Las Vegas to London, protesters, including young people read “Refaat in Gaza’s” final poem, “If I must die.”

At protests in Philadelphia, New York, London and others, white kites were also flown in the air.

“If I must die,” has been translated into over a dozen languages, including Hebrew, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, Tagalog, Tamil, Turkish, Greek, Dutch, Irish, Polish, Serbian, Italian, Somali, German and Vietnamese. For the last several days, the poem has gone viral on several social media networks including Facebook, X/Twitter, and Tik Tok.

The outpouring of popular grief for the respected and loved academic, poet, writer and—by necessity—war correspondent, stands in contrast to the response of the unofficial press organ of the Democratic Party and the Central Intelligence Agency, the *New York Times.*

After refusing to report on his assassination for over a day, when the *Times* finally did report on his killing, the paper smeared the English teacher as someone “known for posting hateful comments about Israel and its citizens,” implicitly justifying his targeted assassination.

This is of a piece with the *Times*’ reporting since October 7, which at every turn has justified Israeli and US war crimes, no matter how depraved and criminal, while downplaying the scale and genocidal character of the Israel Defense Force’s murder campaign, which has claimed well over 18,000 Palestinians as of this writing.

While thousands memorialized al-Ar’eer at in-person protests around the world, on Saturday, several of his colleagues and former students held an online memorial in his honor. The event was organized by Palestine Writes Literature Festival and Susan Abulhawa, author of *Mornings in Jenin.*

This past September, the Palestine Writes Literature Festival held an event at the University of Pennsylvania. Despite the peaceful character of the event, now former UPenn president Liz Magill was attacked by Democrats and Republicans during last weeks’ McCarthyite congressional hearing on the alleged rise of antisemitism for not preemptively canceling the conference.

The real purpose of last week’s hearing, led by Republican fascists who propagate the antisemitic “Great Replacement Theory” and attack billionaire Holocaust survivor George Soros constantly, was not to combat antisemitism, but to badger spineless university presidents at Ivy League universities into publicly declaring that they will clamp down on anti-genocide protests, organizations and clubs that advocate for Palestinian human rights and curtail students democratic rights.

Throughout the hearing Republican and Democratic representatives cited bogus data from the Anti-Defamation League, including the baseless claim that 25 of the speakers at the Palestine Writes festival at UPenn, including musician Roger Waters, a longtime activist for Palestinian and human rights, and Dr. al-Ar’eer were “antisemites.” Waters was blocked by the university from appearing at the festival in person while al-Ar’eer never got the opportunity to leave Gaza to attend.

In their tributes during Saturday’s online memorial, several students noted that Professor al-Ar’eer being denied the chance to go to the festival in Philadelphia was just one of several

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opportunities denied to al-Ar'eer due to the Israeli blockade.

In her tribute to "Professor Refaat," former student Nadya noted that most of his students could not attend the online memorial because they are currently under siege in Gaza.

Nadya recalled that her teacher "cared about what we wrote" and that "teaching for him was not about grades," but helping students become "something more."

Since the Israeli blockade of Gaza prevents students, and everyone else from leaving, Nadya remembered the special effort Prof. Refaat took to use the internet to help his students, "connect us with the world ... he would try and connect us with professors online."

"He wrote my recommendation letters," she said. "I am still finishing my thesis ... I was supposed to give to him to read in a month." Concurring with earlier statements made by Abulhawa, Nadya, concluded, "Dr. Refaat did not die, he multiplied."

As students gave moving testimonials, several friends and colleagues of Dr. al-Ar'eer wrote their thoughts in the chat. Mohammed L. wrote that he had known "Refaat since 1997. We did our BA together and enjoyed since an ever lasting friendship that continued till death [tore] us apart. He had a [sense] of naughtiness and unique humor ... We share our books and cups of tea ... he was so loyal and used to visit my parent in my absence. He did that with other friends who left their parents in Gaza."

Melanie A. wrote, "I worked with Refaat for three years at Islamic University in Gaza. He was a great inspiration to us all. He loved his students and he loved teaching. He always talked about work. We will miss him and his messages to the world."

Malak Z., a friend and student of Prof. Refaat, recalled how he was "the kind of person you feel privileged to be around" and of all the thousands of people he knew, "you ended being in his close circle."

He noted how al-Ar'eer was "the breadwinner for more than 50 members of his family."

"He is family to me, he is family to us, the coolest of professors in the whole world," Malak said, adding, "Israel killed Refaat only to make hundreds more. Refaat lives through us. "

Shaimaa Z. recalled that while teaching Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, "I played Shylock. ... he encouraged us to find the humanity in everyone."

Rawan Y. said his love for "storytelling was infectious" and that he "held on to his humanity despite everything…

"A week before he was killed, I asked him what gave him hope? He was running, trying to find food and water for his kids. He said his kids, his students and the stories he was going to write when this was all over."

"I think of the loss of the stories he was going to write and the many students he was going to teach," Rawan added. "We will carry on his mission to tell our stories."

Yousef said he was, "a poet and a lecturer, his words were universal, his killing was also universal, everyone is talking about him.

"He was the father of storytelling for Gaza, he connected an army of writers around the globe.

"Refaat is a story away."

Ahmed N. another one of Prof. Refaat's students, recalled how al-Ar'eer "encouraged us to be courageous and unapologetic, even against him.

"He trained thousands of students, Gaza men and women, to write unapologetically about Gaza and Palestine.

"He encouraged us to mock the system ... You didn't want to fail him. He made all of us feel so special. He always believed in us more than we believed in ourselves.

"Last night I couldn't sleep, we were watching his recorded lectures on YouTube and 'war poetry.'

"He talked about how Israel purposefully and intentionally targets the poets, the writers, because they are afraid of the words. They are afraid of our poems."

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