

The Voice of Hind Rajab: A harrowing account of the killing of a Palestinian child

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The Voice of Hind Rajab, a moving docudrama written and directed by Tunisian filmmaker Kaouther Ben Hania, focuses on the response of the Palestinian Red Crescent (PRCS) to the desperate cellphone calls of Hind, a five-year-old Palestinian girl trapped by Israeli fire in Gaza in January 2024. The girl, along with six members of her family and two Red Crescent paramedics, eventually died in a hail of lethal IDF fire.

The film, nominated for Best International Feature Film at the 98th Academy Awards (the ceremony will be held March 15), is currently playing in select theaters in the US. It is scheduled for digital release on February 24.

The case, of course, is a notorious one by now. Students taking over Hamilton Hall at Columbia University in April 2024 to protest the mass murder in Gaza renamed the building “Hind’s Hall” in the murdered girl’s honor. American rapper Macklemore issued a protest song “Hind’s Hall” in May 2024. The massacre of the entirely defenseless Hind and her family members has come to epitomize for tens of millions the genocidal-fascistic character of the ongoing Zionist onslaught.

The tragic episode began when the black Kia Picanto in which Hind and her family were attempting to flee Gaza City in search of a “safe zone” was shelled. Her uncle, aunt and three cousins were immediately killed. Hind and another cousin initially survived but were trapped in the wrecked vehicle.

Hind and her 15-year-old cousin Layan Hamada are the only ones left alive in the car, as an IDF unit begins firing. Layan makes a desperate call to the Red Crescent, explaining they are being targeted, a tank is getting closer and that everyone in the car aside from Hind and herself are dead. Seconds after, gunshots are heard once again, and Layan’s screaming abruptly stops.

Hind is now the only one left alive in the vehicle, gravely injured and alone. The PRCS stay in contact with her, as they attempt to gain permission from the IDF to send paramedics to the location to save her. The film dramatizes the scene in the Red Crescent office, but uses the actual audio recording of Hind’s phone call—hence its title.

Around 6 p.m. on January 29, PRCS paramedics Yusuf al-Zeino and Ahmed al-Madhoun leave Al-Ahli Hospital in an ambulance to rescue Hind. After they arrive at the location of the car, they are never heard from again. The last thing captured on a call between the two paramedics and the PRCS communication team is an explosion. Two weeks after the attack, when the IDF finally evacuated the area, the decomposing bodies of Hind, Layan and their family members are discovered. A few meters away, the burnt-out ambulance is found, together with the remains of paramedics Yusuf and Ahmed.

Ben Hania’s script was developed through extensive interviews with the actual PRCS volunteers who handled the calls. The dialogue is rooted in this testimony, capturing the prayers and words of comfort passed on and the frantic internal debates that occur as the staff navigate the complex military and bureaucratic hurdles required to dispatch an ambulance. It focuses on the “invisible” elements of the tragedy — the waiting, the

silence, and the agonizing pursuit of military clearance.

The narrative follows the chronological progression of events, beginning with the initial emergency call from Hind’s cousin and ending with the loss of contact with both the child and the paramedics sent to save her.

As noted, the film uses about 70 minutes of actual audio recordings of Hind’s calls to Red Crescent dispatchers, so Hind’s own voice is heard throughout, as a disembodied presence to which the characters respond.

The film places the audience inside the Red Crescent call center, where operators try to keep Hind calm and conscious while negotiating with Israeli authorities.

The most notable “dialogue” in *The Voice of Hind Rajab* takes the form of the emergency call between Hind and the Red Crescent operators. Those lines center on her fear (“I’m so scared, please come”) and her descriptions of the darkness and the “sleeping” relatives around her, while the operators try to soothe her, keep her talking and extract details about her location.

“If we hang up, she dies alone,” and “What does protocol mean when there’s a child on the line?” argue the desperate, traumatized responders.

The film transforms Hind’s situation into a single?location, time?pressured drama about frontline medics trying—and ultimately failing—to rescue one child, highlighting the human stakes of the Gaza assault and the burden on those who tried to help her.

—Saja Kilani plays Rana Hassan Faqih, a Red Crescent call?center worker who becomes the primary voice speaking to Hind and trying to keep her calm.

—Motaz Malhees is Omar A. Alqam, a dispatcher/paramedic involved in the effort to coordinate and carry out the rescue mission.

—Clara Khoury is Nisreen Jeries Qawas, another senior staff member whose decisions and emotional responses shape the call?center’s reaction.

—Amer Hlehel is Mahdi M. Aljamal, part of the Red Crescent team dealing with the operational and moral weight of trying to reach Hind under fire.

The scenes unfold in a cramped, functional control room filled with desks, multiple phone lines, flickering screens showing maps and GPS, notepads with frantic scribbles and coffee cups—evoking the emergency hub strained by constant incoming calls.

Overhead lights cast harsh shadows; walls hold procedural charts and Red Crescent insignia, while explosions rumble in the distance, heightening the claustrophobia as operators juggle multiple crises.

The chaos and terror build: initial organized response (logging details, radioing ambulances) shifts to emotional strain as Hind’s small voice (“I’m scared, come quickly”) dominates via speakerphone, freezing the room.

Operators pace, argue over protocols (“We need IDF clearance,” “She’ll die waiting”), sweat under fluorescent glare, their faces lit by phone screens—mixing professional duty with raw parental horror.

They weigh the dangers (ongoing shelling, recent PRCS losses) against the coordinated approval with the Israelis and Hind’s fading

consciousness, deciding the chance to save her justifies deployment from nearby al-Ahli Hospital rather than waiting indefinitely.

Focus stays tight on four or five core staff like Rana and Omar, reacting in real time to Hind's pleas; no music, just her audio, along with beeps and static, making the space a pressure cooker of helplessness.

As minutes drag into hours, exhaustion shows—heads in hands, urgent whispers to supervisors—culminating in silence when contact ends, leaving stunned faces amid ringing lines.

Hind's voice—describing herself alone, scared, and surrounded by “sleeping” relatives—creates unbearable emotional pressure; operators like Rana repeatedly emphasize to supervisors, “She's just a little girl, we can't leave her,” framing inaction as tantamount to abandonment. The PRCS has already lost dozens of staff in Gaza by January 2024 but continues operations, as paramedics like al-Zeino and al-Madhoun volunteer knowing the risks, driven by professional commitment and the slim hope of success.

The two paramedics are killed when their clearly marked ambulance is hit. PRCS and multiple human?rights and investigative groups insist the ambulance was deliberately targeted by Israeli forces despite prior coordination, while the Zionist regime has not provided a detailed public explanation addressing these specific allegations.

Ben Hania chose the hybrid documentary-fiction structure to translate the impact of hearing Hind's voice into cinematic form and maintain its impact. She explained in a director's statement that upon hearing Hind's voice

I immediately felt a mix of helplessness, and an overwhelming sadness. A physical reaction, like the ground shifted under me. I couldn't carry on as planned. I contacted the Red Crescent and asked them to let me hear the full audio. After listening to it, I knew, without a doubt, that I had to drop everything else. I had to make this film. I spoke at length with Hind's mother, with the real people who were on the other end of that call, those who tried to help her. I listened, I cried, I wrote. Then I wove a story around their testimonies, using the real audio recording of Hind's voice, and building a single-location film where the violence remains off-screen.

She went on:

At the heart of this film is something very simple, and very hard to live with. I cannot accept a world where a child calls for help and no one comes. That pain, that failure, belongs to all of us. This story is not just about Gaza. It speaks to a universal grief. And I believe that fiction (especially when it draws from verified, painful, real events) is cinema's most powerful tool. More powerful than the noise of breaking news or the forgetfulness of scrolling. Cinema can preserve a memory. Cinema can resist amnesia. May Hind Rajab's voice be heard.

Hind's mother, Wissam Hamada, appears in the film and speaks about her daughter's death with a mix of overwhelming grief, anger and a determination to seek justice so other children do not meet the same fate. She describes Hind's last call and the moment she realized her daughter would not be rescued as an unbearable ordeal that still defines daily life for her and her son, saying her home is now filled with “the loudest silence.”

After Hind's body was found, she publicly condemned the Israeli

killers, asking, “How many more mothers are you waiting to feel this pain? How many more children do you want to get killed?” directly accusing the IDF of responsibility.

She has also condemned how some in the media framed Hind as merely “found dead,” instead of clearly naming the Netanyahu regime and its military who murdered her, seeing that coy wording as part of a wider failure to value Palestinian children's lives.

She has expressed hope that it will “help stop this destructive war and save the other children of Gaza,” seeing it as a way to amplify Hind's voice globally.? In her own writing and statements, she says her grief has become a “duty” to make sure no other child “goes unheard,” and that keeping Hind's story alive is now central to her life.

Investigations have revealed the IDF unit pumped 335 bullets into the car in which Hind and others were sitting. In its meticulous investigation, London-based Forensic Architecture explained that the weapon used for the attack was “firing at a range of 750–900 rounds per minute,” a range exceeding that of the AK-type assault rifle commonly used by Palestinian fighters operating in Gaza (the Israelis, of course, initially claimed Hind was killed by Palestinian fire). “This range of rounds per minute is consistent with Israeli army-issued weaponry such as the M4 assault rifle or the FN MAG machine gun on a Merkava tank,” the investigation determined.

The Forensic Architecture probe, as reported by *Middle East Eye*, used “a mix of kinetic analysis, satellite imagery and footage sourced from the site of the incident” and “also found that the Israeli tank that fired upon the vehicle Rajab was sitting inside must have been positioned within 13 to 23 metres when it killed Layan, Rajab's 15-year-old cousin.” FA concluded: “It's not plausible that the shooter could not have seen that the car was occupied by civilians, including children.”

An Al Jazeera documentary aired October 20, 2025, *Tip of the Iceberg*, revealed the name of the unit allegedly responsible for the massacre as well as the names of the IDF personnel involved. The same day, the Hind Rajab Foundation filed a 120-page document at the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

To their credit, executive producers of *The Voice of Hind Rajab* include prominent figures such as Brad Pitt, Joaquin Phoenix, Rooney Mara, Alfonso Cuaron and Jonathan Glazer.

A viewing of *The Voice of Hind Rajab* is painful but essential for an understanding of the present state of the world and the monstrous crimes being committed against the most defenseless populations.



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