

# The JENIN INQUIRY.org

## Report on the Israeli Invasion of Jenin Refugee Camp

### Appendix H: Refrigerator trucks and the ‘terrorist cemetery’: The Methodology of Hiding Atrocities

Upon arrival in the camp, members of Jenin Inquiry were quickly told by numerous survivors that they were certain the Israeli army removed bodies of their loved ones and neighbors from the camp. No one knew where they were taken, but many people saw the refrigerator trucks near the camp. As time passed, word spread that witnesses in Jericho and on the East Bank of the Jordan River saw similar trucks moving by their areas.

Indeed, on the evening of 11 April, Israeli TV showed pictures of the refrigerator trucks that were waiting to take bodies from the camp to “terrorist cemeteries in the Jordan Valley.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, the witnesses in all three locations appear to be true as they corroborate with intentions stated by the Israeli government and publicized on Israeli TV.

These events were reported in Israeli print media the next day, 12 April.

“The IDF intends to bury today Palestinians killed in the West Bank camp [of Jenin]. Around 200 Palestinians are believed to have been killed in clashes with Israeli soldiers since the start of the operation last week. . . . Military sources said that until now the IDF has not buried any of the bodies. The sources said that two infantry companies, along with members of the military rabbinate, will enter the camp today to collect the bodies. Those who can be identified as civilians will be moved to a hospital in Jenin, and then on to burial, while those identified as terrorists will be buried in a special cemetery in the Jordan Valley. One Israeli source said that the decision to bury the bodies was taken to prevent the Palestinians from using the bodies from propaganda purposes. . . . The Palestinian Authority has expressed concerns that Israel is trying to hide the large number of dead, since it has blocked Palestinian medical teams from evacuating the dead and wounded from the camp during the past week.”<sup>2</sup>

On 15 April, an agreement was reached between the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the Red Cross, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, and the Israeli army not to bury bodies and to bring the corpses to the Jenin hospital. These four groups together brought seven bodies to the Jenin hospital on the 15<sup>th</sup>. They saw another six bodies in the camp, but for lack of equipment and safety left them where they were lying. The Ministry of Health asked the Israeli army for help in bringing the other six bodies seen to its facilities. On 16 April, Israeli soldiers brought one body to Jenin hospital.

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<sup>1</sup> Tanya Reinhart, *Israel/Palestine: How to End the War of 1948*, Seven Stories Press, NY, 168.

<sup>2</sup> Anat Zigelman, Amos Harel, and Amira Hass, *Ha'aretz*, April 14, 2002. Qtd. in Reinhart, 167.

On 17 April, the Israeli army called the director of the Jenin hospital, Dr. Mohammed Abu Ghali, and told him to bring a car to a point approximately two kilometers to the west of the camp, on the main road, and pick up more bodies. He went and they retrieved five bodies from the refrigerator truck. Dr. Abu Ghali asked, “Where are the rest of the bodies?” He was told that this was all there was. Dr. Abu Ghali was certain there were more bodies because he himself, while walking in a closed area separate from the four organization team, had seen 10 corpses lying in the camp two days prior, Monday 15 April, in an area of only 35 meters long. The area where the bodies were laying was a closed military area, hence, he was not able to evacuate them to the hospital.

He had also heard from a young male survivor that on 8 April, some of the young men from the camp collected 25 corpses in a confined area in the hopes of burying them. After collecting the bodies, the army was approaching the area and the young men had to flee. Later, upon returning to the site to continue their work, the bodies were all gone. No one knew what happened to them, including the Jenin hospital.

On Friday 12 April 2002, the number of Palestinian dead was reported by IDF Spokesman Brigadier General Ron Kitri to be 200. By Monday, 15 April, the number had dropped drastically to dozens, then specifically to 46.<sup>3</sup> On 5 May, Jenin Inquiry spoke with Brigadier General Ron Kitri. He said the number of Palestinian dead was 52.

The reduction in the number of dead reported by the Israeli military dropped in direct correlation to their activities between the twelfth and fifteenth of April, stated above and shown on Israeli TV, that of collecting, classifying, and sorting the bodies. The Israeli army had full control over the public perception of how many Palestinians were killed because they had direct control over the relevant data: The bodies. This is how they determined how many were killed and herein lies the origin of the number of dead still used today in public discourse.

What has not been taken into account in public discourse or the reports of various human rights organizations was the removal of Palestinian bodies from the camp in refrigerator trucks and assumed mass burial in the ‘terrorist cemetery’ in the Jordan Valley. This issue, very public while it was occurring, at least in Israeli society, has dropped from the discussion, even though it was never resolved and plays a fundamental role in adjudicating competing claims. The journalists that the Jenin Inquiry spoke with who tried to go to the Jordan Valley in the weeks after it was announced that Palestinians from Jenin refugee camp were being buried there found that the areas they attempted to enter were labeled “Closed Military Zone” and no one was allowed to enter.

Evidence that the Israeli army removed bodies from the camp, and thus largely determined the number of dead, is not lacking. The number of dead remains unresolved specifically because core evidence, publicly acknowledged to exist, has not been investigated. In this sense, neither has the Israeli government or military been held accountable to anyone, or to international law, in their determination, for example, of who was a civilian and who was a ‘terrorist.’ Their activity, then, in classifying and

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<sup>3</sup> Amos Har’el and Gideon Alon, *Ha’aretz*, April 15, 2002, quoted in Reinhart 169-170.

removing the bodies was left up to their objectives, which is precisely why the number of dead fell from 200 to “dozens.”

Recovering the remains of those buried in the ‘terrorist cemetery’ in the Jordan Valley, identifying them, and bringing them home to their relatives for proper burial will answer key questions. This will require a team of forensic pathologists to positively identify the remains. Since only one exists in Palestine, a team must come from other nations. How many Palestinians were killed in Jenin refugee camp from 3-18 April 2002? Of those buried in the ‘terrorist cemetery’ how many were civilians and how many were armed combatants? Precisely what methods and by what criteria did the Israeli army employ to determine who was a civilian and who was a ‘terrorist’? Of those that were buried in the ‘terrorist cemetery’ and were armed combatants, how many surrendered before being killed and/or buried? This is an important question because there are several cases, well documented and corroborated by several organizations, of both civilians and armed combatants surrendering or being captured and then being executed. The case of Abu Jandal, the leader of the resistance in the camp, is most prominent.

All of these questions, and more, must be answered before the case of Jenin refugee camp can be considered a closed case. Until that time, may all who care about international law and human dignity continue to pursue answers to these blaring, unresolved questions of the destruction of the Jenin refugee camp.