

## Gaza: Where Genocide Continues All the Way to the Graves



In a phone call marked by anxious urgency and searing anger, the voice of 20-something Motaz Alyan rings out: “I need cement to cover the stones beneath which lies the body of my lifelong friend Fahd before the winter arrives.”

Ten phone calls since his friend’s death yielded only one response: “There is no cement. What’s available costs ten times more and isn’t even structurally sound!”

Tears pool in his hazel eyes. “The Israeli occupation didn’t stop at killing my childhood friend his height, his laughter, his sense of humor,” he says. “It also denied him, and me, the basic right of a dignified burial.

I couldn’t even properly seal his grave.” His face bears the same sorrow as his voice, and he adds, “I’m terrified stray dogs might dig him up. I’ve seen it happen during the first famine wild dogs tearing into graves, dragging out the bodies of martyrs.”

After a pause, he continues: “Fahd’s brothers and I searched through the rubble of bombed homes for usable stones. We mixed brown earth with water and fine gravel. It’s not structurally sound could collapse at any moment.

Then we covered the grave with metal sheets shredded by Israeli shrapnel, which are now corroding in the weather.” He concludes, “We know mud and broken stones are no substitute for cement, but what other choice do we have?”

Motaz's struggle to find materials to build a grave for his martyred friend is a reflection of a daily ordeal endured by over two million people in Gaza. The Israeli occupation prevents the entry of burial shrouds, construction materials, and other essentials for grave preparation denying martyrs proper Islamic burials.

### The Burial Crisis

Motaz tells Noon Post, his voice tinged with grief and helplessness: "I'm afraid the winter will come too soon. I pray to God that I can seal Fahd's grave with cement and place a headstone worthy of his name and the place he holds in my heart. His soul is with God the most merciful of all but honoring and preserving his body is a duty. It's a way of showing loyalty to his memory."

Outside Sheikh Shaaban Cemetery, opposite the al-Ahli Arab Hospital (known as the Baptist Hospital), Umm Nawaf, 60, sits beside the grave of her son Mohammed, killed by an Israeli drone strike. His four children were orphaned without a final goodbye. She places her hand on the headstone that bears his smiling photo silenced by Israel.

"He was martyred at the start of the war after he evacuated his wife and children to the south, trying to protect them from the bombardment. We were lucky. We buried him according to Islamic law. At the time, there were shrouds, functioning cemeteries, and cement available at normal prices."

But her tone turns to anguish. "We weren't so lucky with my daughter's husband. We couldn't find building materials or grave equipment. The Israeli occupation had bulldozed most of the cemeteries. Even the dead weren't spared—they were denied burial!"

She continues: "At first, we buried him in the courtyard of the Baptist Hospital because the city was under occupation and there were no accessible cemeteries. Then the hospital administration asked families to remove the graves to set up emergency tents.

His family searched for another cemetery, but most were full or unreachable, like the Eastern Cemetery, the Tunisian Cemetery, and Abu al-Kass in Shujaiya all bulldozed and now war zones."

Many Palestinian families are now unable to find burial plots for their loved ones—martyrs and others alike. Some resort to reopening old graves to fit additional bodies inside.

"We reopened my daughter's husband's grandfather's grave," Umm Nawaf explains. "Grave prices exceeded 1,000 shekels, and there's no empty land, no building materials. Sometimes gravediggers are forced to build new graves atop

old ones just to keep up with the number of martyrs.”

### “Digging Graves Under Fire”

In Deir al-Balah, gravedigger Abu Jihad Baraka heads to the cemetery where he spends his days among the dead. His worn hands dig and clear space for new graves. Visibly angry, he begins: “The Israeli occupation didn’t just target the living they came after the dead. These cemeteries were bulldozed and desecrated. They’ve banned the entry of burial shrouds. Not a day passes without new dead.”

He adds: “The cemeteries are full. Construction materials have been unavailable since the start of this war of annihilation. At first, we used leftover stones, cement, and tiles. But with the war dragging on and the death toll rising, we now bury martyrs on top of each other.” His son Ahmad interjects: “No time to talk we have to go find space to bury the next martyrs!”

Gravediggers operate under extreme and dangerous conditions. Israeli airstrikes have targeted them multiple times during their work.

Abu Jihad concludes with a message for the world: “Come to the cemeteries. Film them. Tell the world even the dead aren’t safe from Israel, people!”

### Ministry of Religious Affairs: Over 40 Cemeteries Destroyed

Noon Post contacted Gaza’s Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, which strongly condemned Israel’s ban on the entry of shrouds and grave construction materials. The ministry labeled it a “barbaric, inhumane act yet another crime in a long list of systematic violations against the Palestinian people.”

“Denying grieving families the right to bury their loved ones with dignity is a blatant violation of religious and humanitarian values and a flagrant breach of international law, which guarantees respect for the dead and dignity for their families,” the ministry stated.

It added: “Out of 60 cemeteries in Gaza, Israel has destroyed 22 completely and severely damaged 18 others. In addition, graves were bulldozed, exhumed, and over 2,300 bodies were stolen. This has forced families to bury the dead in mass graves on hospital grounds, schoolyards, public parks, and even in the streets.”

When asked how many martyrs have been denied proper Islamic burials, the ministry replied: “There are no official numbers yet, but medical, human rights, and media organizations have documented unofficial burials including withheld bodies and mass graves. Some were placed in numbered cemeteries.”

Media and Palestinian sources estimate that by April 2025, Israel had withheld the bodies of at least 684 martyrs 256 of them in so-called “numbered

cemeteries.”

The ministry continued: “The tightened blockade and ban on construction materials have exacerbated the crisis. We’ve had to resort to using metal sheeting to cover graves, instead of cement tiles. This has led to foul odors from decomposing bodies, and in some cases, wild animals digging up graves.”

They concluded: “We are constantly working to identify safer areas to use as temporary cemeteries and are expanding existing ones in regions deemed ‘safe’ by the occupation even though, in truth, no place in Gaza is safe.”

In Gaza today, even death is a journey marked by pain, resilience, and sorrow. Loved ones shed tears over graves hastily dug, striving to preserve the dignity of a body buried in its homeland’s soil.

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