



## Common Ground News Service - Middle East

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### **A plea for peace from a bereaved Palestinian father**

by Bassam Aramin  
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ANATA, West Bank – I fought with my daughter on the day she was shot.

On her way out the door to school, Abir announced, in that way children have of doing, that she would be playing with a friend that afternoon rather than coming straight home to study for an exam scheduled for the next day. She was 10 years old, smart, dedicated to her schoolwork and still a little girl.

She wanted to play. I told her to not even think about it.

If I could tell her anything now, it would be: Go. Do whatever you want. Play.

Because now, she never will. She will never laugh again, never hear her friends calling her name, never feel the love of her family wrapped around her at night like a warm blanket.

Abir, the third of my six children, was shot in the head as she left school January 16, caught in an altercation between Israel Border Guard troops and older kids who may or may not have been throwing rocks. She died two days later.

I know what the Israeli army has said about the incident, and I know what Abir's older sister Arin saw with her own two eyes: Abir was running away from the troops when she suddenly stopped and fell, and blood splattered onto the ground. An independent autopsy confirms the most likely cause of death: a rubber bullet, through the back of Abir's head. I have that bullet in my house, because poor Arin, watching her sister get shot, picked up the bullet and brought it home. I was not surprised when the Israeli army tried to blame Abir for her own death. First we were told that she was among the rock throwers; then we were told that "something" blew up in her hands - though her hands remained miraculously in tact - before she could toss it at the Border Guard jeep.

I was not surprised, but the anguish that such fabrications cause my wife and me is hard to express. Our baby was killed - must her name and innocence be desecrated, as well?

It would be easy, so easy, to hate. To seek revenge, find my own rifle, and kill three or four soldiers, in my daughter's name. That's the way Israelis and Palestinians have run things for a long time. Every dead child - and everyone is someone's child - is another reason to keep killing.

I know. I used to be part of the cycle. I once spent seven years in an Israeli jail for helping to plan an armed attack against Israeli soldiers. At the time, I was disappointed that none of the soldiers was hurt.

But as I served out my sentence, I talked with many of my guards. I learned about the Jewish people's history. I learned about the Holocaust.

And eventually I came to understand: On both sides, we have been made instruments of war. On both sides, there is pain, and grieving and endless loss.

And the only way to make it stop is to stop it ourselves.

Many people came to support and comfort us as Abir lay dying, her small face chalk white, her eyes forever closed. Among those who never left my side were a number of men I have recently come to love as brothers, men who know my past, and who share it. Men who, like me, were trained to hate and to kill, but who now also believe that we must find a way to live with our former enemies.

Israeli men. Every one of them, a former combat soldier.

These men and I are members of Combatants for Peace. Each of us, 300 Palestinians and Israelis, was once on the front lines of the conflict. We shot, bombed, tortured and killed. We believed it was the only way to serve our people.

Now we know this not to be true. We know that to serve our people, we must fight not each other but the hatred between us. We must find a way to share this land each people holds in the depths of its soul, to build two states side by side. Only then will the mourning end.

I will not rest until the soldier responsible for my daughter's death is put on trial and made to face what he has done. I will see to it that the world does not forget my daughter, my lovely Abir.

But I will not seek vengeance. No, I will continue the work I have undertaken with my Israeli brothers. I will fight with all I have within me to see that Abir's name, Abir's blood, becomes the bridge that finally closes the gap between us, the bridge that allows Israelis and Palestinians to finally, inshallah, live in peace.

If I could tell my daughter anything, I would make her that promise. And I would tell her that I love her very, very much.

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\* Bassam Aramin lives in Anata, just outside of Jerusalem. This article is distributed by the Common Ground News Service (CGNews) and can be accessed at [www.commongroundnews.org](http://www.commongroundnews.org).

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