

Voices from Shatila and Burj Al Barajneh

In Shatila camp there is a convergence between pain and hope, tragedy and bravery, and between the justice of the Palestinian cause and continuous conspiracies. Almost 500 families are enclosed in 200 square meters. From a distance you see that Shatila has been turned into ruins. Not a single house is left standing. The closer you come to the camp, the more you see the destruction. This destruction has a fetid smell; it is the smell of death. The residents of this camp, along with those of Burj Al Barajneh, survived a brutal siege and continued to resist through months of Amal's shelling and food blockade. Seeing them now makes one feel ashamed for having thought the camp would fall. We didn't realize that these people would make life out of death, houses out of ruins and food out of dust, in order to preserve their camp.

Soon after the blockade was partially lifted, journalists visited Shatila and Burj Al Barajneh. Below are interviews with some of the Palestinians who were besieged, as printed in the Kuwaiti newspaper, *Al Watan*.

SHATILA

Samira Al Khatib

37 years old

«I still can't believe the shelling and shooting are over. It is a miracle that we survived. They were harassing us, destroying the whole camp in the most barbaric way ever. During the siege, I was feeding my children boiled rotten vegetable peels. Food provisions were confiscated at checkpoints. All were targeted for death.»

Izzat Al Taibi

35 years old

«I do not believe there is anyone in Shatila not suffering from some kind of physical or mental disease. During the siege, I remained among the damp, smashed stones. I was shivering with each shell that landed, trying to hide my head in the fortifications. As for food, I fed my relatives seven cats before they knew what it was! Later on, they were fighting for a leg of boiled cat or dog...»

Now we ask for a plan to build new houses, as there is no shelter left. We also need services, especially sanitation.»

Moh'd Abu Khalid

30 years old

«It was the most savage war the Palestinians have ever experienced. We had enough weapons, but we were running out of food. I was among the group formed to hunt cats and dogs. Once when we were running after a cat on the outskirts of the camp, we clashed with the Amal gangs and heavy fighting started. Shatila was a red line for us. It did not collapse because of the fierce resistance of the people. All knew that the fall of Shatila would signal the end of all Palestinian presence... We want relief. We want a normal peaceful life like any other human society. We want to live together with the Lebanese like we always did, until we go back to our homeland, Palestine.»

BURJ AL BARAJNEH

Burj al Barajneh did not suffer as much as Shatila during the siege, as it is

larger in size and population (approximately 20,000). Burj contains more medical and social institutions. Nevertheless, interviews with those who were besieged in Burj Al Barajneh did not differ much from those in Shatila.

Fatima Khalid

60 years old

«My daughter Randa was martyred at the passageway,» she said, breaking into tears. «She went to fetch food and milk for the children after the ceasefire, assuming that Amal would not fire on women. She never came back. During the siege, I was feeding my grandchildren sugar dissolved in boiling water. Even after the siege, we did not get any of the provisions that were said to have been sent to us.»

Dalal Faoni

35 years old

«I keep thanking God that we are still alive. I can't forget the happenings during the siege. I can never forget the tragic scene of a brother screaming when they were amputating his hand

Burj Al Barajneh

