

Abed, a 28-year-old paramedic officer working with the Palestinian Medical Relief Society, (PMRS) woke at around 5am on 3

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January 2023 to the sound of Israeli forces raiding Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem.

“I heard loud voices near my house. I got dressed and put on my paramedic gear. As I tried to leave my house, heavy shooting toward me started. I then heard Adam Ayad shouting. He was calling for his mother. Another person, one of PMRS volunteer paramedics, was also shouting and calling me to come and help.”

“When they started shooting towards me, I felt helpless. I had the capacity to help – at least to stop his bleeding until we got him to hospital. I knew there were other injuries as well, but I couldn’t reach them... I was afraid. Not only for my own safety, but for my family because there was shooting towards my house. One of the bullets hit my brother’s house, near the bedroom, and the bullet could have entered the window and hit him, his wife, or their children. Another bullet entered the bedroom of my uncle’s house... There was heavy shooting although there were no confrontations, the youth from the camp were afraid to come to the area because of the heavy shooting.”□

16-year-old Adam Ayad had been shot while inside a car with two others, who were also injured in the incident. With heavy shooting towards the car, Adam got out of the vehicle and tried to hide under it, calling for help. A volunteer paramedic in the field unable to reach him due to the heavy shooting. After a delay several minutes, when the shooting stopped, Abed and the volunteer were able to reach the injured and provide first aid. The volunteer paramedic tended to Adam, while Abed treated the other two persons injured.

“During the incident we were calling for any car to come, we got two cars then I ended up using my own car as a third... We drove to the hospital. I had someone from my family sit in the back and help... He wasn’t trained in first aid, though, so if something were to happen, he would not have been able to help. Meanwhile I was driving so wouldn’t have been able to help.”

There are four first responders for PMRS in Dheisheh camp. Abed is the team leader. After so many fatalities in the camp, Abed arranged with PMRS for a social worker to talk with them. The volunteers blamed themselves for not being able to save people who had been injured, they were questioning the value of their work.

“At the time Sajed Mizher was killed [a paramedic killed in Dheisheh in 2019], we were 8 first responders in the camp. With the increased targeting of first responders and the high levels of violence during raids, people became more reluctant to go into the field during military operations. They are worried for their own safety, especially since there is no ambulance vehicle that can provide some kind of protection. Now we are four. The main fear of the volunteers is to have another person die in their hands. They feel alone.”

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