



Statement on the Murder of Six-Year-Old Wadea Al-Fayoume in Illinois and the Role of Genocidal Language in His Death

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention mourns the murder of 6-year-old Wadea Al-Fayoume and the grievous injury of his mother Hanaan Shahin in an act motivated by anti-Muslim hatred. It also condemns US officials and the media for their reckless embrace of genocidal language against Palestinians, which inflames pre-existing anti-Muslim sentiment and inspires fresh violence.

Al-Fayoume and Shahin, both Palestinian-American, were at their home in Plainfield Township, Illinois, on Saturday, October, 14, 2023, when their landlord Joseph Czuba, came to their door. Al-Fayoume, who regarded Czuba as a grandfather figure, ran to greet him only to be stabbed 26 times with a seven inch military style blade while the older man yelled, "You Muslims have to die! You are killing our kids in Israel. You Palestinians don't deserve to live!" Shahin was also stabbed and choked as she tried to defend her son. She is currently recovering from her injuries at a hospital.

Court documents revealed that Czuba confronted Shahin right before the attack and "told her he was angry at her for what was going on" in Israel. Czuba's wife told investigators that he "listens to conservative talk radio on a regular basis" and became obsessed with the war between Hamas and Israel.

The use of dehumanizing language is a common tactic in the genocide of one group by another. Its efficacy is well documented and can be seen in cases such as the Holocaust, when the Nazis legislated their race-based "othering" of Jews even before the start of the war and the erection of death camps, and in 1990s Rwanda where the murderous litany of Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines incited Hutus to kill the "Tutsi cockroaches" even before the start of the genocide on April 7, 1994.

Very unfortunately, the responses to the Hamas terror attacks of October 7, 2023 have included myriad instances of genocidal rhetoric being espoused by Israeli officials and US politicians. Two notable examples come from Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, who announced on October 9, "We are imposing a complete siege on Gaza. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed, We

are fighting human animals, and we act accordingly,” and United States Senator Lindsey Graham, who told Fox News in an interview on October 10, “We are in a religious war here. I’m with Israel. Do whatever the hell you have to do to defend yourself. Level the place.” Neither man in his comments made distinctions between Hamas terrorists and the two million Palestinian civilians that are confined to Gaza.

These declarations come on the heels of decades of increasingly anti-Palestinian policies by the Israeli government which have created what human rights organizations have called “an apartheid state.” However, Israel’s latest, most far-right coalition government, led by long-time Likud party leader Benjamin Netanyahu, has been the most unapologetically genocidal in its language. One example comes from March of this year, when Finance Minister Bezael Smotrich delivered a speech in Paris saying the notion of a Palestinian people was artificial. “There is no such thing as a Palestinian nation. There is no Palestinian history. There is no Palestinian language,” he stated bluntly.

While officials in the US administration have not themselves used such blatant rhetoric, their strong statements in support of Israel and Netanyahu’s leadership offer a tacit endorsement of it. In President Biden’s [first remarks on the matter](#) on the afternoon of October 7, he said, “In this moment of tragedy, I want to say to them and to the world and to terrorists everywhere that the United States stands with Israel. We will not ever fail to have their back,” and “... my administration’s support for Israel’s security is rock solid and unwavering.”

The media, too, has contributed to the dehumanization of Palestinians in their use of language and by failing to treat the bombings of civilians in Gaza with as much compassion as those of the Israelis killed by Hamas. The Nation’s Jack Mirkinson [points out](#) that the media treats Palestinian deaths as somehow less tragic than Israeli ones. He uses the example of [an interview](#) by the BBC’s Kirsty Wark with Husam Zomlot, head of the Palestinian Mission to the United Kingdom, whose six family members had been killed by Israeli air strikes. Her response to him was, “I’m sorry for your own personal loss. I mean, can I just be clear, though, you cannot condone the killing of civilians in Israel, can you?” Even the oft-repeated phrase calling Gaza the world’s largest “open air prison” implies complicity of civilian Palestinians in some sort of crime, which signals that they are deserving of punishment.

According to FBI statistics, [hate crimes against Muslims in the United States skyrocketed](#) immediately after September 11, 2001, and are still on an upward trend. Language is such a powerful tool that it must be carefully considered at all times, especially by influential politicians and the media. Even if genocide is not the intent of their ill-considered expressions, the domestic impact of their support for violence, vengeance, and the dehumanizing language of genocide abroad must be understood. The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention holds the Biden administration and the US media accountable for fanning the flames of anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim sentiment in the USA during the first week of this horrific crisis in Israel/Palestine.