

Despair deepens for displaced Palestinian family

ABDEL KAREEM HANA AND LEE KEATH
Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip — Exhaustion, despair and anger are grinding away at Ne'man Abu Jarad. Once again, for the 11th time, he and his family have been forced to uproot and move across the Gaza Strip.

"It's a renewal of the torture. We're not being displaced, we're dying," Ne'man said last week as the family packed up their possessions and tents in Gaza City to escape escalating Israeli bombardment.

The next day, they unpacked in southern Gaza on barren former agricultural land outside the city of Khan Younis, unsure where they would now find food and water.

This has been the Abu Jarads' life for nearly two years, since fleeing their home in the far north of Gaza days after Israel launched its onslaught in response to Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack. Like countless Palestinian families, they have fled the length of Gaza and back, forced to move every few months as Israel attacks each new shelter. The Associated Press has chronicled much of their journey.

During the ceasefire that began in January, they had a bittersweet return to their home, which was damaged but still standing. But within two months, Israel broke the ceasefire, and the Abu Jarads had to wrench themselves away.

With each move, Ne'man and his wife Majida try to preserve some stability for their six daughters and their 2-year-old granddaughter amid the misery of tent life. The youngest is 8-year-old Lana; the eldest is Balsam, in her 20s and married.

But the sense of futility is weighing heavier. No end is in sight and Ne'man fears it will get worse.

"What's coming is dark," he said. "We might be expelled (from Gaza). We might die... You feel like death is surrounding you. We just scurry from place to place, away from death."

Since May, the family's refuge had been a tent in Gaza City. It wasn't easy, but at least they got to know the neighborhood and their neighbors and figured out where to get water and medical care.

Their daughters could see friends from before the war, who were also displaced nearby. Another family in a neighboring building let their daughter Sarah



A truck transports the Abu Jarad family through Nuseirat, Gaza Strip, on Sept. 10 after they were displaced from Gaza City following evacuation orders issued by the Israeli army.



ABDEL KAREEM HANA PHOTOS, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Awatif Abu Jarad, 57, sits beside her family's belongings Sept. 10 in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, after fleeing Gaza City following evacuation orders issued by the Israeli army.

come use their internet to study for online high school classes.

Food was more difficult, as Israeli restrictions on aid pushed Gaza City into famine. Ne'man joined hundreds of others waiting for aid trucks to enter from Israel. It was dangerous — Israeli troops regularly opened fire toward the crowds, and Ne'man saw people get killed and wounded, Majida said. But he sometimes came back with food.

A few weeks ago, they found a school for Lana. "She was very excited. Her life would have some regularity," Majida said.

But Israel ordered the population to evacuate, preparing a new assault to seize Gaza City. Bombardment came closer. One strike leveled an apartment tower a block away, sending shrapnel that pierced the Abu Jarads' tent. Another destroyed a house across the street, killing members of the family sitting outside, Ne'man said.

Lana attended only three days of classes. But it was time to go. Last Thursday, they joined a growing exodus of Palestinians fleeing south.

Dressed in pink pajamas and leaning against her father in their new camp the next day, Lana described her best friends Sila and Joudi bidding her farewell as they left Gaza City. They hugged her and told her they loved her — and they were crying, Lana said.

"But I did not cry," she added firmly. "I will not cry at all. I won't be sad."

Majida and Ne'man worry about Lana. Their other daughters had a grounding of normal lives. But Lana was only 6 when Israel's cam-



The Abu Jarad family moves their belongings into a newly built tent Sept. 11 in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, after being displaced from Gaza City.

paigned overturned their lives.

"She is gaining awareness in the middle of war, bombardment and life in the tents," Majida said.

Lana can be stubborn and impatient.

"There's things my sisters put up with that I don't put up with," Lana said. She can't tolerate the discomforts of tent life. Having to use the makeshift bathroom upsets her. "Sitting and reading, I can't get comfortable," she said.

Over the months, everything pushes the family to a boil — boredom, lack of privacy, the daily toil of lugging water, gathering firewood, searching for food, cleaning the tent. Behind that lie darker thoughts: the feeling this could be their fate forever, the fear a strike could kill them.

Crammed together in the tent, the girls squabble and fight sometimes.

"We were a model family, understanding and loving," Ne'man said.

"I never imagined we'd reach this point. I get afraid the family will fragment from all the pressure."

The latest move drained what little money they had — hundreds of dollars to buy a new tent and rent a truck to carry their belongings.

It also stripped them of everything that made life bearable. The new camp lies in a stretch of barren dirt and fields. There's no market nearby, no schools. They have to walk more than a mile to get an internet connection. They are surrounded by strangers.

"We're living in a desert," Ne'man said.

Friday morning, their daughters walked more than a half-mile to catch up with a passing water truck. It ran out before they could fill all their plastic jugs.

The family spent the day clearing their spot of land, assembling their two tents — one for the family, one for Ne'man's sister. As they worked, an Israeli strike rang out

in the distance. They watched the black smoke rise over Khan Younis. Exhausted by the end of the day, Ne'man still had to dig a latrine and set up the bathroom.

The area was a closed Israeli military zone until a few weeks ago, when Israel announced displaced people could move there. An Israeli military position is not far away. They can see tanks moving in and out.

"It's not safe here," Ne'man said. Majida tried to focus on practicalities.

If someday water trucks start coming closer, she said, the girls won't have to walk as far and will grumble less. Once they set aside a corner for a kitchen, where they can cook and do washing, that will start creating a daily routine.

"The more details of daily life that are in place, the more comfortable we will feel," Majida said. "Things will get better," she said again and again, without a trace of optimism in her voice.

Four days later, on Tuesday, a voice message from Ne'man came to the AP.

"We're sitting here unable to eat," he said. They have almost no money to buy food. No aid is reaching them.

Worse, a man claiming to be the owner of the land came by, backed by armed men, and demanded they pay rent or leave. Ne'man can't afford rent. He can't afford the costs of moving, but may have no choice.

"Soon we'll die of starvation," he said. "Two years, all our energy has been drained, physically, mentally, financially. We can't bear more than this."



Faith Leaders Standing For Peace

Today, on the International Day of Peace, we as faith leaders come together to express our united belief in peaceful civic engagement. At a time when divisive rhetoric and actions are increasingly accepted as a form of expression, we condemn violence in all its forms.

Relying on our diverse faith traditions, we speak with a united voice to declare that differences of opinion in civil society must be addressed with mutual respect and dignified dialogue.

Our faiths require us to be peacemakers in our communities through our words and deeds. We call on elected officials, community leaders, and all Arizonans to embrace the ideals of listening and good faith negotiations.

Reverend Lainie Allen
St. Alban's Episcopal Church

Bhikkhu Vasu Bandhu
Arizona Faith Network

Mary Beth Barone
St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Reverend Lynn Bartlow
St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Lucy Ben
Navajo Nation

James Ben
Navajo Nation

Reverend Doug Bland
Arizona Interfaith Power & Light

Reverend Judith Boroto
St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Reverend Jessica Braxton
Saguaro Christian Church

Ron Breland
Warfighter Ranch

Reverend Michael Bush
The United Church of Christ

Maria Calamity
Navajo Nation

Reverend Caleb Campbell
Desert Springs Bible Church

Canon Sister Linda Campbell
Our Lady of Guadalupe Monastery

Exec. Director Albert Celozo
Arizona Interfaith Movement

Reverend Deborah Christine
St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Rabbi Samuel Cohon
Congregation Beit Simcha

Susan Davis
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

Canon Lisa Derrick
Arizona Faith Network

Bishop John Dolan
Catholic Diocese of Phoenix

Reverend Thomas Dunham
Streams in the Desert Lutheran Church

Reverend Anne Ellsworth
Episcopal Diocese of Arizona

Nancy Fahey Smith
Pima County Interfaith Council

Elder Joan Fenton
Presbyterian Church (USA)

President Emeritus Billie Fidlin
Arizona Faith Network

Reverend Matthew Funke Crary
Mountain Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Pastor Alison Harrington
Southside Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Jay Hartley
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona

Reverend Greg Hartman
New Spirit Lutheran Church

Reverend Naomi Hartman
Lutheran Church of the Foothills

Reverend Dr. Toni Hawkins
Southwest Conference United Church of Christ

Bishop Deborah Hutterer
Grand Canyon Synod of the ELCA

Reverend Dr. Candace Lansberry
Chandler United Methodist Church

Reverend Jamili Omar
Unitarian Universalist Church

Reverend Meredith Joubert
Santa Cruz Valley United Methodist Church

Reverend Steve Keplinger
Grace St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Sat Bir Kaur Khalsa
Tucson Sikh Soc. & Culture of Peace Alliance

Bishop Emeritus Gerald Kicanas
Catholic Diocese of Tucson

Pastor Delores Kropf
St. Michael the Archangel (ECC)

Reverend Kate Lehman
St. Teresa of Avila (ECC)

Director Ren Liu
Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation

Imam Touseef Mansoor
Masjid Al Mustafa

Linda Martino
St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Minister Russ Matteson
Pacific Southwest District Church of the Brethren

Reverend Randy Mayer
The Good Shepherd United Church of Christ

Reverend Dr. Brad Munroe
Presbyteries of Grand Canyon and de Cristo

Rabbi Nina Perlmutter
Lev Chadash

Jamescita Peshlakai
Navajo Nation

Reverend Gina Pollard
United Methodist Church

Bishop Carlo Rapanut
Desert SW Conf. of The United Methodist Church

Chaplain Maggie Rawling
Adat Chaverim

Bishop Jennifer Reddall
The Episcopal Diocese of Arizona

Pastor Gerald Richard
Prince Chapel AME Church

Marilyn Riggs
Black Mountain United Church of Christ

Elder Matthew L. Riggs
Area Seventy, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Chaplain Ron Russell
Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix

Rabbi Susan Schanerman
Temple B'rith Shalom

Rabbi Emeritus Sanford Seltzer
Congregation B'nai Midbar at Saddlebrooke

Exec. Director Reverend Katie Sexton
Arizona Faith Network

James Sterling
Community Christian Church

Dr. Stephen Stillwell Jr.
St. Michael the Archangel (ECC)

Rebecca Strain
St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Kathleen Tobin
St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Reverend Amalia Vagts
Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, ELCA

Reverend Monica Whitaker
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz
Arizona Jews for Justice

Learn more at: www.azfaithforpeace.org