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# **Justice for Tawfik Aldeljabbar: Louisiana teen killed by U.S.-funded occupation force**

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Seventeen-year-old New Orleans area native Tawfik Abdeljabbar was murdered by Zionist occupation forces in the Palestinian West Bank.

Community members are mourning the death of Tawfik Abdeljabbar. The 17-year-old native of Gretna, Louisiana - a U.S. citizen - was murdered on Jan. 19 by an Israeli Occupation Force officer in the occupied West Bank, in the Palestinian town of Al-Mazra'a. The U.S. State Department has confirmed the killing.

The young man was a student at the Muslim Academy Gretna Islamic School. The family returned to Palestine last year to reconnect with their relatives. Tawfik hoped

to improve his Arabic and had college plans.

On the night of Jan. 20, several hundred gathered for a vigil at Masjid Omar mosque in Harvey, Louisiana. A separate vigil was held at a family home. One attendee spoke to Struggle-La Lucha about the experience.

"The house was full, people in every corner, in every room. Some were crying and being consoled; others were consoling until it was their turn to be consoled.

"As I scanned the sea of faces, looking for Tawfik's closest relative in order to pay my respects, every face in that sea was one I knew. These are the faces of the moms of the countless kids I've taught in my 17 years at Muslim Academy. I knew everyone. Instantly, I felt soothed, relieved that I was surrounded by people who felt this loss as deeply as I did.

"As I hugged each one, probably longer than I would have normally, my tears fell. The hugs tightened. I didn't want to let go. These mothers understood me, understood the pain of loss. We birth these babies, raise the children, and nurture the youth in the security afforded to us by where we live. But when we go home, instead of security in the knowledge that we'll see our children, the insecurity of IF we see our children becomes an ever-present thought. I cried.

"'I didn't see you this morning,' Tawfik's father cried at his side when he bid his boy a final farewell.

"It reminded me of the last time I saw Tawfik. 'Have a great summer! Stay out of trouble!' I advised him, knowing that going home (to Palestine) meant IF, yet safe in the assumption of 'it couldn't happen to someone I know.'

"I cried a little more. I thought about Khair, Tawfik's younger brother, the child I taught for nine months, who I grew to love and nurtured through the year. I cried harder. But surrounded by my people, by our faith, by our shared resilience, and in

the knowledge that death is not the end for our martyrs, gave me peace ... for a while. Until I left, until I returned home, where my rage at the ongoing genocide of my people welcomed me home.”

Another NOLA Palestinian community member spoke to Struggle-La Lucha.

“This needs to stop — the murder, us in the U.S., funding these murders. I want the broader community to understand that this is not the first time this happens. Shireen Abu Akleh was a Palestinian with American citizenship, and she, too, was killed by the IOF.

“We should care, regardless of the citizenship a person holds. And the only reason we’re telling everyone this is a murdered child from our community is so that the next time you see your Palestinian friend or co-worker, you understand that this — the occupation — is a dark shadow in their life — and that it could be any of us killed.

“What would you do and/or say if this was your Palestinian American friend or colleague killed? Will you remain silent and pray for us in the quiet? I fear the disappointment that may come with this answer.

“I think the media coverage needs to get better. Media claims objectivity, and yet, the biased reporting that favors Israel shows otherwise.”

Struggle-La Lucha also spoke with Kevin Erickson, a Louisiana State University employee in finance. Erickson says that he has “a quarter century of trying to change American policy toward Palestine” behind him and associates with Faith Organizing for a Free Palestine. Some of the members attended vigils for Tawfik.

“Americans know more than they let on. But they’re good at deflecting, always bringing it back to Hamas and how Hamas is the alpha and omega of this tragedy.

“But no more. We now realize that there are clear victims of the \$10 million per day

that America gives the Israeli military.

"Until Troy Carter [U.S. representative for Louisiana's second congressional district] flies over to Nablus or Jenin and sits in front of one of the mothers whose son was killed by American guns and looks her in the eyes and tells her why her son's killing was necessary for American national security, until Troy Carter looks her in the eyes, we don't want to hear from him or any news outlet about how evil Hamas is the cause of all this."

We at Struggle-La Lucha say justice for Tawfik Abdeljabbar! In the name of workers and oppressed people here in the belly of the beast — who have no interest in upholding U.S. imperialism — we say end the occupation! Free, free Palestine!

