

# Remembering Sabra and Shatila

16th September 1982 had been one of the darkest pages of human history. Thousands of innocent and unarmed girls, women and elderly men in two refugee camps of Shatila and Sabra were surrounded by Lebanese Phalangists; an ally of Israel. A cold blood murder was determined for all of them by the same very people who claim to be the victims of Hitler's concentration camps.

Ariel Sharon was then Israel's defense minister. According to Ariel Sharon's 22 September 1982 declarations in the Knesset (Israeli parliament), the entry of the Phalangists into the refugee camps of Beirut was decided on Wednesday 15 September 1982 at 15.30. Also according to General Sharon, the Israeli commandant had received the following instruction: "The Tsahal forces are forbidden to enter the refugee camps. The 'mopping-up' of the camps will be carried out by the Phalanges or the Lebanese army."

From dawn on 15 September 1982, Israeli fighter-bombers were flying low over West Beirut and Israeli troops had secured their entry. From 9am, General Sharon was present to personally direct the Israeli penetration, installing himself in the general army area at the Kuwait embassy junction situated at the edge of Shatila. From the roof of this six-storey building, it was possible to clearly observe the town and the camps of Sabra and Shatila.

From midday, the camps of Sabra and Shatila - in reality a single zone of

refugee camps in the south of West Beirut - were surrounded by Israeli tanks and soldiers, who had installed checkpoints all around the camps permitting the surveillance of the entrances and exits. During the late afternoon and evening, the camps were bombarded with shells.

By Thursday 16 September 1982, the Israeli army controlled West Beirut. In a release, the military spokesperson declared, "Tsahal controls all the strategic points of Beirut. The refugee camps, including the concentrations of terrorists, are surrounded and closed." In the morning of 16 September, the following order was issued by the army high command: "The searching and mopping up of the camps will be done by the Phalangists/Lebanese army."

During the morning, shells were fired down towards the camps from high locations and Israeli snipers were shooting down at people in the streets. At about midday, the Israeli military command gave the Phalangist militia green light to enter the refugee camps. Shortly after 5 o'clock pm, a unit of approximately 150 Phalangists entered Shatila camp from the south and southwest.

At that point, General Drori telephoned Ariel Sharon and announced, "Our friends are advancing into the camps. We have coordinated their entry." Sharon replied, "Congratulations! Our friends' operation is approved." For the next 40 hours

*The Nakba 16.9.03*  
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inside the "surrounded and sealed" camps, the Phalangist militia raped, killed and injured a large number of unarmed civilians, mostly children, women and old people. These actions were accompanied or followed by systematic roundups, backed or reinforced by the Israeli army, resulting in dozens of disappearances.

Until the morning of Saturday 18 September 1982, the Israeli army, which knew perfectly well what was going on in the camps, and whose leaders were in permanent contact with the militia leaders who perpetrated the massacre, did not intervene. Instead, they prevented civilians from escaping the camps and organized for the camps to be lit up throughout the night by flares sent into the sky from helicopters and mortars. The count of victims varies between 700 (the official Israeli figure) and 3,500 (notably in the inquiry launched by the Israeli journalist Kapeliouk). The exact figure will never be determined because in addition to the approximately 1,000 people who were buried in communal

graves by the ICRC or in the cemeteries of Beirut by members of their families, a large number of corpses were buried under bulldozed buildings by the militia themselves. Also, particularly on 17 and 18 September, hundreds of people were carried away alive in trucks towards unknown destinations, never to return.

The victims and survivors of the massacres have never received any judicial instruction, whether in Lebanon, Israel or elsewhere. After 400,000 people took to the streets in protest, the Israeli parliament (Knesset) named a commission of inquiry presided over by Mr Yitzhak Kahan in September 1982. In spite of the limitations of the commission's mandate (it was a political and not a judicial mandate) and the total absence of the voices and demands of the victims, the Commission concluded that the Minister of Defence was personally responsible for the massacres.

Upon the insistence of the Commission, and the demonstrations that followed its report, Mr. Sharon resigned from his post of Minister of Defense but remained in the government as Minister Without Portfolio. It is worth noting that, during the 'Peace Now' demonstration immediately prior to Sharon's 'resignation', demonstrators were attacked with grenades, resulting in the death of a young demonstrator.

Several non-official inquiries and reports including those of MacBride

and of the Nordic Commission, based mainly on the testimony of eyewitnesses, as well as other pieces of journalistic and historical research, have brought together vital pieces of information. These texts, in part or in full, are annexed to this file.

*Europe*  
In spite of the evidence of what the UN Security Council described as a 'criminal massacre,' and the sad ranking of the Sabra and Shatila massacres in humankind's collective memory as among the great crimes of the 20th Century, the man found "personally responsible", his associates and the people who carried out the massacres have never been pursued or punished. In 1984, the Israeli journalists Schiff and Yaari concluded their chapter on the massacre with this reflection: "If there is a moral to the painful episode of Sabra and Shatila, it has yet to be acknowledged." This reality of impunity remains true to this day.

The United Nations Security Council condemned the massacre with Resolution 521 (19 September 1982). This condemnation was followed by a 16 December 1982 General Assembly resolution qualifying the massacre as an "act of genocide." The world really gets schizophrenic when Sharon and his financial, political and defense backers and supporters including President Bush and Tony Blair talk about campaign of Fight against terrorism. Which Terrorism? If you can't see the number one terrorist of the world i.e. Ariel Sharon and you can't stop backing him then whom you are fooling?