

Jane Salmonsens: Another Tragedy in Gaza – Please Pray for Mohammad el Sharif and his Family

Jane Salmonsens, a St John's parishioner, is the Director of FIREFLY INTERNATIONAL, an Edinburgh charity that supports children affected by the ravages of war, providing them with critical opportunities to heal, learn and build a peaceful future. It partners local organisations in Gaza, Bosnia and among Syrian refugees, providing education, mental health support and peace-building initiatives tailored to the needs of war-affected children.

Edinburgh charity **Firefly International**, in partnership with 2 other UK charities, has been funding and supporting a child trauma clinic in Gaza, helping children traumatised by previous wars come to terms with memories of death and destruction. The centre closed soon after the horrendous attacks by Hamas in southern Israel, on October 7th last year, and it was bombed soon after that. The small staff team all scattered. The centre Director, Mohammad el Sharif, managed to stay in touch with Firefly staff on and off, after that, until the end of last month, 27 November, when all contact was lost. Mohammad, a trained child psychotherapist with no links to Hamas, was arrested by the Israeli Defence Force. He and his family (see below in recent, happier times)



were with a group of others who were all on the move, yet again, walking from Gaza City westwards to a supposedly safer area. Soldiers stopped them at a

checkpoint, separated women and children on one side of the road, men on the other, and took all the men away, Mohammad among them. His wife Alaa, and the three little boys, are now without him, starving, homeless and desperately worried about him. Please pray for Mohammad whom I know well, Alaa and the 3 boys, Hadi, Ilyas and Hafez.

Alaa made this mobile phone movie, which is now over a year old, but as Mohammad wanted it to be widely shown, please take a look at it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TR2qdNAO00>

Let's hope that doesn't turn out to be his legacy.

For a quick look at how things used to be, before October 7th, please have a look at this too. Mohammad used to run quarterly 'open days' to give the kids a break from a life style full of stress and fear. It is impossible to say how many of the children shown are still alive:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1498n4Vjgsc>

Firefly has just started to support a project in Cairo, teaching about 300 children of refugee families from Gaza – a drop in the bucket but at least it's something. This doesn't lessen the need for prayers, not only for Mohammad and his family of course, but for all the people of Gaza in their terrible suffering. I am told that Mohammad is one of an estimated 20,000 men from Gaza who have been taken away by Israeli forces for interrogation and detention - none of whom have been heard of since - in their hunt for Hamas operatives. So for Mohammad, Alaa, Hadi, Ilyas and Hafez, and all the people of Gaza, thank you for all your prayers this last year and more, and please will you pray even more now too.

Jane Salmonson, Director, Firefly International.

www.fireflyinternational.org