



Hamas spread the false claim an infant who died as a result of a heart defect was killed during the "return marches" to defame the IDF and Israel

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Overview

► On May 14, 2018, the Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip reported the death of **Layla Anwar Ghandour**, an eight-month-old infant. Allegedly, she had been killed while with her parents at one of the demonstration sites near the security fence on the Gaza Strip-Israel border. According to the ministry of health, **she choked to death on tear gas from a canister dropped by the IDF.**

► The story of her death was accompanied by a Palestinian campaign to defame the IDF and the State of Israel. However, two days after her death **the New York Times published an article quoting on a report from an unnamed doctor stating she had died from a congenital heart defect and not, as claimed, from tear gas inhalation.** At the same time, her name was removed from the list of Palestinian fatalities issued by the ministry of health, claiming that **the circumstances of her death were being examined.**

The infant's cousin, a terrorist operative detained by the IDF while trying to penetrate into Israeli territory, said during interrogation that **Yahya al-Sinwar, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip, paid the family a large sum of money to say she had died from tear gas inhalation** and to hide the fact she had died from heart disease. The whole affair is **another example of the manipulation of the media coverage of the "return marches," which relies on Hamas and the many media in the Gaza Strip controlled or influenced by Hamas.**



Campaign of lies following the death of the infant. Right: Notice commemorating Layla Ghandour posted to Hamas' Facebook page. The Arabic reads, "The shaheed, the baby Layla Anwar Ghandour, eight months old, who died as a shaheed after inhaling [tear] gas east of Gaza [City] #million_man_return[march]" (Palinfo Facebook page, May 15, 2018). Left: A picture that went viral, showing the dead infant in her mother's arms (aljazeera.net, May 20, 2018).

The infant's death: the false version cooked up by Hamas

► On May 14, 2018, on the Friday of the "return marches" during which more than 60 Palestinians were killed, the death of Layla Anwar al-Ghandour was also reported. Layla Anwar al-Ghandour, an eight-month-old baby, was allegedly with her family at one of the demonstration sites near the security fence. According to the announcement from the ministry of health, she choked to death after inhaling tear gas from a canister dropped by the IDF (Facebook page of the spokesman of the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip, May 15, 2018).

► **The parents of Layla Ghandour blamed the IDF for the infant's death.** Her grandmother reportedly said the family had gone to participate in the "return march" and when they arrived at the "return camp" they chose a secure site far from the IDF sniper fire and tear gas. She claimed that without warning they were suddenly bombarded with a series of many tear gas canisters. The intense amount of tear gas immediately choked the infant. She also claimed they did not know where the canisters came from, if they had been dropped by an IDF spokesman drone or were lobbed by soldiers from behind a sand hillock (Filastin al-A'an, May 16, 2018).

Reactions to the infant's death

► The story of the infant's death led to a wave of strong criticism in the media against the IDF forces and the means Israel was using against the "demonstrators." Layla Ghandour became a symbol, and the Palestinian and Arab media went into high gear to smear Israel and IDF as murderers of children.



Right: Cartoon printed in al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, the official PA organ, accusing the IDF of murdering Layla Ghandour (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, June 21, 2018). Left: The funeral held for Layla Ghandour (Filastin al-A'an, May 16, 2018).

Questions about the infant's death raised by the New York Times

► However, the story of the infant's death quickly raised doubts, and two days later those doubts appeared in a New York Times article. According to the New York Times, the infant's family, which lives in a Gazan refugee camp, acknowledged she had been born with a congenital heart defect called *patent ductus arteriosus*. **An unnamed doctor in Gaza told the AP that he believed that a heart ailment, not Israeli tear gas, was the cause of Layla's death** (New York Times, May 16, 2018).

► After the Times article was published, **a spokesman for the Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip said Layla Ghandour's name had been removed from the list of Palestinians killed during the "return marches" and that the circumstances of her death were being examined**. According to the ITIC's information, so far her name has not been restored to the list.

Real cause of death revealed by infant's cousin, who was captured by the IDF

► On June 21, 2018, the attorney for the southern district of Israel handed down an indictment in the district court in Beersheba for **Mahmoud Omar**, 20, from the Gaza Strip, an operative in a terrorist network in the Gaza Strip called **Mujahidin** (a network affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and which split from Fatah in 2006). **Mahmoud Omar was captured by IDF soldiers while trying (with other operatives) to cut through the security fence and penetrate into Israeli territory. He is a cousin of the infant, Layla Ghandour.**

According to the indictment, Mahmoud Omar said that when he was rioting against IDF forces his mother called him and told him that the daughter of her sister Maryam had died. When he arrived home **he learned that Layla Ghandour had died as a result of a congenital heart defect, the same defect from which her brother died (at a similar age in 2017)**. Somewhat later he heard that his aunt Maryam and her husband Anwar had told the media that Layla died from inhaling tear gas used by the IDF during the demonstrations along the border. **Mahmoud Omar said that Yahya al-Sinwar, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip paid the family 8000 Israeli shekels (about \$2,200) to claim Layla had died from tear gas inhalation during the events near the border, and to hide the fact that she had died of a disease.**