



The Martyrs Foundation – Palestinian Branch: a Hezbollah foundation operating in Lebanon, used as a channel for transferring Iranian financial support to families of Palestinian shaheeds

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Overview

The Martyrs Foundation – Palestinian Branch (hereinafter: the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation) was established in 1993 by Hezbollah’s Martyrs Foundation as a branch of the Iranian Martyrs Foundation¹. Its purpose is to support the families of Palestinian shaheeds and cater to their needs in the social, educational and medical spheres. Another purpose of the foundation is “to spread the culture of jihad and *shahada* [martyrs death] among the Palestinian people...”. The undeclared purposes of the foundation are to provide a social envelope to the Palestinian terrorism, support organizations and institutions affiliated with Iran and demonstrate to the Palestinians and the entire Arab world that Iran supports them.

► **The Palestinian Martyrs Foundation belongs to Hezbollah, is subordinate to its political council, and operates among the Palestinians (alongside Hezbollah’s Martyrs Foundation, which supports the families of Lebanese shaheeds). The foundation’s base of operation is Lebanon, but it also has representations in the Gaza Strip, Syria, and possibly elsewhere. The source of the funds transferred to the families of Palestinian shaheeds is Iran. The funds are transferred from Iran to Lebanon, and from there to the families of Palestinian shaheeds through a charity association, bank transfers and moneychangers. The main channel for the distribution of funds to the families of Palestinian shaheeds is the Al-Ansar Charity Association in the Gaza Strip, affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).**

¹ See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from April 11, 2019, “Hezbollah’s Martyrs Foundation: purpose, mode of operation and funding methods”



Emblem of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation (which is based on the Iranian Martyrs Foundation). The text underneath the foundation's name reads, "We will carry their deposits [i.e., orphans]... we will serve the ones they left behind" (website of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation)

Spheres of activity

- ▶ The Palestinian Martyrs Foundation has existed for 17 years. In April 2003, it registered and **received license from the Lebanese Interior Ministry**. According to the details specified in the license, **the center of the foundation is in Harat Hreik** (a neighborhood in Beirut's Shiite southern suburb, the Dahiya). Apparently, it also has branches **in southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley**. Upon the establishment of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation it was decided that apart from **financially supporting families and orphans of shaheeds**, the foundation would also engage in other fields of support, such as awarding **scholarships to underprivileged Palestinian college students**, building **clinics, orphanages and rehabilitation centers for handicapped Palestinians** (Lebanese Gazette,² April 10, 2003).
- ▶ The foundation is also engaged **in additional activities**: organizing **visits to holy tombs**; financing festive meals for the breaking of the Ramadan fast, around **World Jerusalem Day** (the last Friday of the month of Ramadan, on which Iran's proxies around the world engage in pro-Palestinian activity); **distribution of clothing** to needy families in the holidays; **appreciation ceremonies** for families of shaheeds and **organizing tours for the orphans**.
- ▶ Following are details about the foundation's **scope of activity**, based on its website and information accumulated over the years:
 - ◆ The foundation takes care of **over 7,000 families of Palestinian shaheeds and 15,000 orphans**. Most of the families receiving the support reside in the Gaza Strip (the foundation distributed support **to about 4,800 families in the Gaza Strip**, updated to early 2020).

² *Al-Jaridah al-Rasmiyyah* (hereinafter: The Lebanese Gazette).

◆ In April 2009, the list of families supported was increased by **1,100** families in Judea and Samaria, and it is reasonable to believe that since then, their number increased even more.

◆ **The monthly support for each family in the Gaza Strip is \$100-300** per family of an unmarried shaheed, and **about \$600** per family of a married shaheed.

◆ **In addition to the monthly support**, the foundation fully subsidizes **all medical treatments** of families of shaheeds which are not covered by UNRWA and provides **scholarships** for the families, in the amount of up to LBP 500,000 per year (about \$330) (Al-Akhbar, February 9, 2009).

► **A test case** of Iran's use of **supporting families of shaheeds in Judea and Samaria for instigating terrorism** may be found on **February 24, 2016**, in the period of the **intensive popular terrorism activity in Judea and Samaria**³:

◆ During a press conference at the Iranian embassy in Beirut, **Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mohammad Fatah Ali announced that Iran was supporting the so-called Quds Intifada and the families of shaheeds. As an expression of this support, he said, Iran would donate \$7,000 to every family of a Palestinian shaheed and \$30,000 to every family whose home was destroyed by Israel**⁴. **The donation would be carried out by the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation** (Pal Today, February 24, 2016).

◆ Two days after the press conference at the Iranian embassy, **the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, being the Palestinian branch of the Iranian Martyrs Foundation, was quick to publish this news item on its website in Arabic**, under the title, **"Iran does not give up on Palestine. Support project for the Quds Intifada and forms to be filled out."** At the bottom of the item there were links to two forms to be filled out by those

³ During February 2016, the Palestinian popular terrorism campaign was very intense. Prominent terrorist attacks included the following: On February 3, 2016, three terrorists from the Palestinian village of Qabatiya carried out an attack at Old Jerusalem's Nablus Gate, killing two Israeli soldiers serving in the Border Police. On February 18, 2016, two youths entered a supermarket in the Shaar Binyamin industrial zone and stabbed two Israelis at the supermarket in two different places at the same time. One of the stabbed Israelis, a soldier, was seriously wounded and died of his wounds. On February 26, 2016, a Palestinian tried to stab soldiers at a checkpoint near Beit El. The terrorist was shot and killed. The number of Israeli fatalities from September 2015 until late February 2016 reached 33.

⁴ The amount to be paid to each family of shaheed who was killed in the popular terrorism campaign **was much higher** than the Iranian payment to 5,000 Gazan families of shaheeds who have been killed since the Second Intifada. **Each of them received an average of \$400**. The families of the shaheeds of Operation Protective Edge **received a similar amount of \$400**. **The high amount of \$7,000 was intended to provide significant support for families, representing an incentive to carry out terrorist attacks and assist Iran** in presenting itself as a country that supports the Palestinians.

interested in receiving the Iranian financial support: **Support for a Shaheed Family Form, and Support for Families whose Home was Destroyed Form**. The applicants were required to send the forms **to the email address of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation in Lebanon**, which appeared on the forms (website of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, February 26, 2016). **The speed with which the forms were uploaded to the website indicates that they were prepared in advance as part of an Iranian campaign whose purpose was to demonstrate Iranian support for the Palestinians and the Palestinian popular terrorism campaign.**



The press conference at the Iranian embassy in Beirut where Iranian ambassador to Lebanon Mohammad Fatah Ali announced the financial support. The press conference was attended, inter alia, by Osama Hamdan, Hamas’s official in charge of foreign relations. The Arabic sign in the background reads, “Press conference on the implementation of Iran’s statement in support of the Quds Intifada.” The Arabic text below reads, “Iranian Embassy in Beirut” (YouTube, February 24, 2016)



Right: “Support for a Family of Shaheed Form.” Left: “Form of Support to [a family] whose house was demolished” (website of Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, February 26, 2016)

Financing sources and transfer methods

In the ITIC's assessment, the financial support provided by the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation to the families of Palestinian shaheeds amounts to **several millions of dollars every year, of which close to \$2 million are granted to families of shaheeds in the Gaza Strip**. In addition, funds are distributed for other purposes mentioned above, such as medical treatment and scholarships. In the ITIC's assessment, **the main budget for supporting the families of Palestinian shaheeds comes from Iran**, although the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation has its own funding sources.

► The Palestinian Martyrs Foundation **operates a donation channel called the Guarantee Project**. This channel enables donating funds for supporting families of shaheeds and orphans by applying to the foundation by phone or by email (yatim@shahidpalestine.org). According to a poster of the project from October 2016, **the required annual donation is \$480, while the required monthly donation is \$20** (website of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, no date; Ya Sour website, October 30, 2016).



Poster of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, calling for donation to the Guarantee Project for orphans (Ya Sour website, October 30, 2016)

► The main activity of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation appears to be **in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip**. The foundation seems to have representatives **also in Syria, and possibly in Jordan and Egypt**. Families of shaheeds in **Judea and Samaria** receive their funds through **the Al-Ansar Charity Association in the Gaza Strip** or directly from Lebanon, **by bank**

transfers or moneychangers selected by the families of shaheeds (website of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, February 26, 2016, March 2, 2016).⁵

Collaboration with institutions affiliated with Iran

The activity of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation takes place **in collaboration with the Palestinian-Iranian Friendship Association**, operating mainly in Syria, and with **the Al-Ansar Charity Association in the Gaza Strip, which is affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)**, the Palestinian terrorist association preferred by Iran. It can be assumed that there are other institutions involved in providing the Iranian support to families of Palestinian shaheeds.

The Palestinian-Iranian Friendship Association

► **The Palestinian-Iranian Friendship Association (Safa) is a Palestinian institution whose purpose is to strengthen the Palestinian-Iranian relations.** The association operates mainly in **the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria, but also has a branch in Lebanon.** The **head of the association is Dr. Mohammad al-Bhisi** (Al-Haqiqa, Tariq al-Quds, the website of the Palestinian-Iranian Friendship Association).



Right: The emblem of the association (Facebook page of the Palestinian-Iranian Friendship Association, July 4, 2016). Left: Dr. Mohammad al-Bhisi, chairman of the Palestinian-Iranian Friendship Association (Tariq al-Quds, the website of the Palestinian-Iranian Friendship Association, January 4, 2020)

► The Palestinian-Iranian Friendship Association is related to the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation. It serves as a channel to funnel Iranian financial support to the families of

⁵ See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from March 2, 2016, "Encouragement for the Palestinian Terrorist Campaign through Financial Support"

Palestinian shaheeds and orphans in Syria and possibly also in Lebanon. In addition, the foundation is engaged in cultural, media-related, social, political and religious activity among the Palestinian population in Syria and Lebanon.

► A senior figure in the Palestinian-Iranian Friendship Association is **Majda Rumeiti**, codenamed **Umm Hassan**. In 2011, she headed the **Support Authority for Families of Shaheeds and Orphans**, an entity operating as part of the association. In 2016, she served as the association's treasurer, and in 2018 she was member of its central leadership (website of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, July 2, 2011; Al-Alam, August 31, 2016; the local news website of the Rashidiyah refugee camp, January 15, 2018).

Al-Ansar Charity Association in the Gaza Strip⁶



Right: Emblem of the Al-Ansar Charity Association as it appears on its official Facebook page (Facebook page of the Al-Ansar Charity Association, January 18, 2015). Left: Nafez al-A'raj, the chairman of the Al-Ansar Charity Association and representative of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation in the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of the Al-Ansar Charity Association, February 11, 2015)

► **The Al-Ansar Charity Association is an Islamic charity operating in the Gaza Strip. It is affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).** The association is headed by **Nafez al-A'raj, who is affiliated with the PIJ.** In addition, **Nafez al-A'raj serves as the representative of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation in the Gaza Strip.** Since 2002, the association has funneled **Iranian financial support**, through the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, to families of Palestinian shaheeds in the Gaza Strip and in Judea and Samaria, **mainly those killed from the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005).** In recent years, the association has also begun to distribute financial support to families of shaheeds from the Gaza Strip killed **during**

⁶ For details, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from February 13, 2020, "Iranian support for Palestinian terrorism: Distribution of Iranian funds to shaheeds' families in the Gaza Strip by PIJ-affiliated Al-Ansar Charity Association"

Operation Protective Edge. In addition, it provides financial support to **families of prisoners incarcerated in Israeli prisons**, and to **families whose homes were destroyed as a result of IDF activity.**

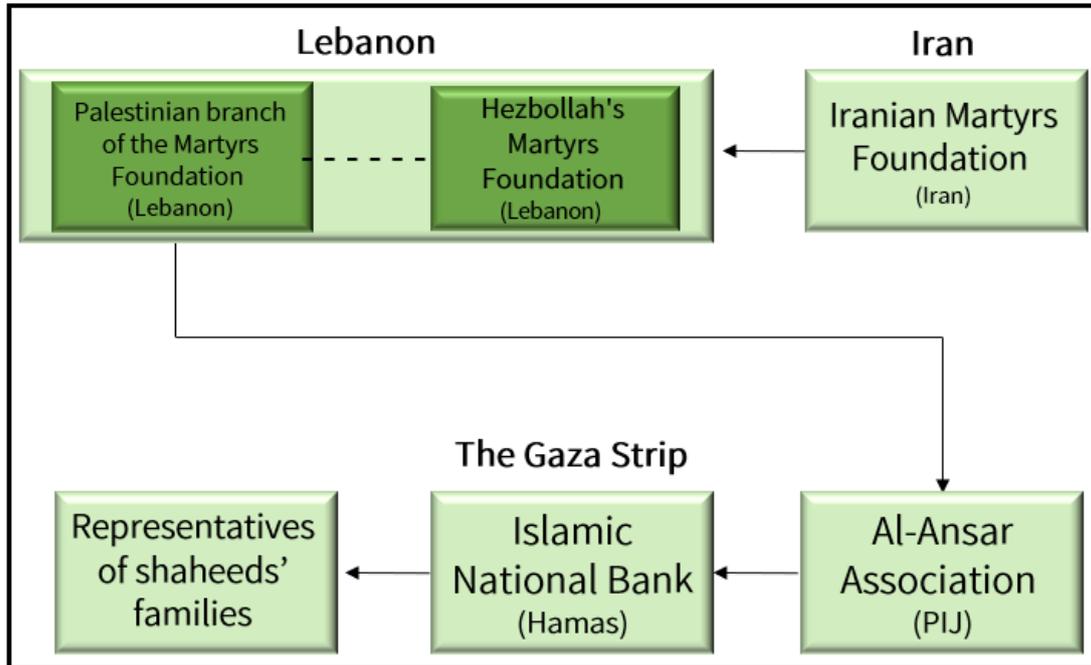
In late January 2020, the Al-Ansar Charity Association distributed Iranian support funds to families of shaheeds killed from the beginning of the Second Intifada until Operation Protective Edge (2014). The funds were transferred to the association **by the Iranian Martyrs Foundation** through the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation. The amount distributed in the Gaza Strip among the families of shaheeds was not specified. However, in the ITIC's assessment, similarly to 2018, **the total amount was close to \$2 million, paid to about 4,800 families** (each family received an amount of \$300-600).

► There are several institutions involved in the process of transferring the funds from Iran to the families of shaheeds in the Gaza Strip: **The Iranian Martyrs Foundation, its Palestinian branch in Lebanon, the Islamic National Bank** (a Hamas institution), and **the PIJ-affiliated Al-Ansar Charity Association, which is an executive wing of sorts for the distribution of the funds.** During the distribution of the payment vouchers in January 2020, **the photo of Qassem Soleimani**, killed by the United States in a targeted killing, was posted in the Al-Ansar office, as well as the Iranian flag, the emblem of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, and the inscription “Iran is with the families of shaheeds.” All of this was done **to glorify Iran and increase its influence among the Gazan public.**



Photo of Qassem Soleimani, the Iranian flag and the emblem of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, which were posted in the offices of the Al-Ansar Charity Association in Gaza while distributing the vouchers to the representatives of the families of shaheeds (Facebook page of the Al-Ansar Charity Association, January 27, 2020)

Fund transfer to families of shaheeds from Iran to the Gaza Strip



Senior figures of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation

► **The director general of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation is Hajj Bilal Sa'ad**, who has apparently held this post at least since 2009 (Al-Akhbar, February 9, 2019; website of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, August 22, 2010; website of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, July 7, 2011; Saida City website, September 25, 2018). There are some entities which are subordinate to the directory general, including **the [Mutual] Guarantee Department, the Families' Department, as well as representatives of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation in Syria and the Gaza Strip.**



Meeting in Sidon: A delegation of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation meets with Sheikh Maher Hamoud, chairman of the World Association of Religious Scholars of the Resistance (Saida City website, September 25, 2018). In the ITIC's assessment, the person on the left is Bilal Sa'ad, the director general of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation.

► The founders of the association as listed in its establishment license are as follows:

- ◆ **Mohammad Ahmad Burjawi**, who also served as the association’s representative to the Lebanese government. Burjawi is one of the founders of **the Al-Imdad Islamic charity association (a Hezbollah institution engaged in charity) and served as chairman of the association** (local news website of the village of Al-Khiyam, October 20, 2008; Al-Imdad association’s website, February 2019).
- ◆ **Abd al-Halim Ibrahim Atawi** is one of the founders of **the Al-Imdad Islamic charity association, which is affiliated with Hezbollah and Iran**. He served as **member of Hezbollah’s political council** (updated to May 2011) (Al-Khiyam website, October 20, 2008; Janoubia, May 2, 2011).
- ◆ **Bilal Ahmad Naim**. No additional details were found about him.
- ◆ **Mohammad Wajih Saleh**, served in May 2009 as **Hezbollah’s official in charge of northern Lebanon**. In October 2017, he was **member of Hezbollah’s political council** (LebanonFiles website, May 11, 2009; local news website of Byblos, October 9, 2017).
- ◆ **Sheikh Abbas Mohammad Sadeq Harb**, Imam of the village of Halusiyah in southern Lebanon, **affiliated with Hezbollah. Was incarcerated in the Ansar detention camp** (Al-Ahed, July 9, 2015; Al-Ahed, April 3, 2019).
- ◆ **Dr. Mussa Mohammad Sharrara**. No additional details were found about him.

It appears that most of the founders of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation and most of the foundation’s senior officials today are Hezbollah activists and figures affiliated with Hezbollah and Iran. In view of that and in view of the fact that members of Hezbollah’s political council, including the official in charge of the Palestinian Portfolio⁷, occasionally deliver speeches at events of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, **it can be estimated that the foundation is part of Hezbollah and is apparently subordinate to its political council** (website of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation, August 22, 2010; Sawt al-Watan, April 5, 2016).

⁷ The official in charge of the Palestinian Portfolio in Hezbollah, who is also referred to as the official “in charge of Palestinian Relations in Hezbollah” is a member of Hezbollah’s political council who is in charge of the relations with Palestinian elements (Janoubia, April 22, 2015; Al-Manar Channel, February 24, 2020). At present, this post is held by **Hassan Hobballah**, a former Hezbollah MP (Al-Manar Channel, February 24, 2020).

The United States' designation of the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation as a fund supporting a terrorist organization

► **The US Department of the Treasury** refers to Hezbollah's Martyrs Foundation in Lebanon and the Palestinian Martyrs Foundation as two branches of the Iranian Martyrs Foundation. In 2007, the US Department of the Treasury designated both as funds supporting the terror organizations.

► According to the US Department of the Treasury's statement (July 24, 2007), the Iranian Martyrs Foundation is an organization which **“channels financial support from Iran to several terrorist organizations** in the Levant, **including Hizballah, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).** To this end, the Martyrs Foundation established branches in Lebanon staffed by leaders and members of these same terrorist groups. Martyrs Foundation branches in Lebanon have also provided financial support to the families of killed or imprisoned Hizballah and PIJ members, including suicide bombers in the Palestinian territories.”