

Thousands attend funeral for Kamel Jawad, Dearborn resident killed by Israeli airstrike in Lebanon

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Thousands gathered at the Islamic Center of America in Michigan on Sunday to attend the funeral of Hajj Kamel Ahmad Jawad, a Dearborn resident killed by an Israeli airstrike in Lebanon on October 1. The 56-year-old husband and father of four was a US citizen who often traveled back to Lebanon to visit family and engage in humanitarian work.

Jawad and his family are well known in the close-knit Dearborn community, home to the largest Lebanese population in the US. A fundraiser in tribute to his memory has raised over \$57,000 for the Lebanese Diaspora Relief Organization.

At the commemoration service, Jawad's children, nieces, nephews and siblings spoke about his generosity, humor and unflinching resolve in the face of danger and under attack from Israel. His daughter Nadine described how the last time they spoke, she heard a bomb hit near him. Her father was "the one who stood against oppression, who stood against Zionism, who was unequivocal in his stance for Palestine and Lebanon, who stood against Israel, and who Israel killed."

His last voice message to the family, which she translated to English, was: "Happy, peace and blessings upon you. We are OK, but if something happens to me, your obligation is to the poor."

His son Ali described how he would load up as many bags as he could fit when traveling back to Lebanon, even if it meant leaving his own clothes behind; memorizing the favorite candies of different children to pack among medicine and other supplies.

One of his nephews, Hassanein, told attendees how he was staying with him when Israel launched the attack on Lebanon. He described the horror faced by those on the ground and his uncle's bravery, "I looked over my shoulder and he was there with the owner of the shops

paying off people's debts. He put so much food in front of my eyes on people's tables. On Monday September 23, while I was in class, he called and said, 'Pick up your bags, we don't have enough time.' Two minutes later, about 50 yards from the house, we started to come under fire. We were being carpet bombed.

"The whole country was being carpet bombed, and what you guys see on social media is nothing like what we see in person," he continued. "I was waiting for him to pick me up and he was on the phone with my mom reassuring her of my safety, although we were not really safe. To everybody who called him while we were driving through the missiles, he would say, 'It's OK. Nothing is happening,' although we were inches from dying multiple times... People were calling him left and right and asking the Hajj [Jawad] for help. During all of this, he was stopping in the middle of the street while people were running to safety and just emptying out his pockets. We were under fire of missiles, and he was stopping at the ATM... We picked up so many people and took them to safety."

The family has at this point declined all media requests and deferred to a moving statement published by Nadine for the family. She wrote:

We are honored by my father's sacrifice. In his last days, he chose to stay near the main hospital in Nabatieh to help the elderly, disabled, injured, and those who simply couldn't financially afford to flee. He served as their guardian, provided them with food, mattresses, and other comforts, and anonymously paid off their debts.

However, my father never viewed himself as a savior. His response to political conflict was

always simple: ‘I stand with the oppressed.’ Many others, just like him, risk their lives every day to alleviate the mass suffering caused by Israel’s genocide in Gaza that now spreads violence through Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Lebanon. My father’s actions are part of a much larger movement of people who refuse to stay silent in the face of oppression. His life is one of over 50,000 lost at the hands of Israeli aggression across the Middle East. The fact that he was an American citizen should not make his story more important than others. As Muslims, we believe that every life matters. If my dad’s story stands out to you, every other civilian murdered by the Israeli regime should as well.

The statement ends: “My father’s story is not just about him; it’s about a man who stood with the oppressed and dedicated his life to uplifting others... Our father’s message was clear: stop arming, aiding, and abetting our oppression and start caring for the people struggling for their freedom and dignity.”

In a separate post on social media Friday, Nadine shared a screen shot of her exchange with a media contact who reached out to her to write on her father’s death as a “unique” opportunity to “humanize” the bombing of Lebanon.

“I understand. But the media has had a year to humanize 50,000 people who were bombed. People are dying under rubble and their stories are all over social media. There’s no humanity in any of this... My story is only ‘unique’ because my dad was an American citizen. But the reality is the country and the media have been dehumanizing Arabs and American citizens like Shireen Abu Akleh far before my father died.”

Since launching a full-scale war on Lebanon on September 23, Israel has killed thousands and internally displaced more than one million people in the country of 5.5 million. While Jawad is currently the only American citizen whose death has been confirmed as a result of the bombing, the US State Department reports that more than 8,000 American citizens have contacted the embassy requesting assistance to leave.

Matthew Miller, spokesman for the State Department, told a press briefing on October 3, that Jawad’s death was “an unavoidable tragedy” and insisted that the Department has been urging people to leave for months.

Rena Bitter, Assistant Secretary of Consular Services at

the State Department, said during a press briefing Friday that the government was reserving seats on commercial flights for US citizens and offering loans for purchasing tickets. However, only a few hundred American citizens have reportedly left on these flights.

One Lebanese-American who spoke to *Al Jazeera* said she was told by the US embassy “to find a way out by herself.”

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer urged Secretary of State Antony Blinken to “do more” to get US citizens out of Lebanon. “From US Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib’s congressional district alone, 140 US citizens or permanent residents are struggling to find passage out of Lebanon,” the letter states.

Socialist Equality Party candidate for US President Joseph Kishore, who is on the ballot in Jawad’s state of Michigan, attended the funeral and released a campaign statement condemning the murder. It states:

The Socialist Equality Party and our election campaign condemn the killing of Kamel Ahmad Jawad, a US citizen and father of four from Dearborn, Michigan, who was murdered in an Israeli airstrike in Lebanon last Tuesday. His death is not a ‘tragedy,’ as the Biden administration describes it, but a crime, part of the ongoing genocidal assault carried out by Israel with the full backing of the United States.

The statement continues, “Jawad’s murder is only one of the many crimes being committed by the Israeli government with the direct complicity of the US. The Biden administration has provided the military, financial and political support that enables Israel to carry out these atrocities. The weapons that killed Kamel Jawad were supplied by Washington. Biden’s government is financing the slaughter and giving Israel carte blanche to continue the massacre, just as it has done in Gaza for over a year.”



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