

OPINION

Opinion: A Connecticut call for Israel to release Palestinian doctor Hussam Abu Safiya

By **Stanley Heller**

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And other Hearst papers

On Nov. 22 the Middle East Crisis Committee gave Palestinian doctor Hussam Abu Safiya its Courage Award at the Palestine Museum US in Woodbridge. It had to be done "in absentia" as this doctor and hospital director has been in a series of Israeli prisons since last December. His attorney says he's lost a third of his body weight. Looking at photos from a year ago compared with what you see in a video circulating in the Israeli media the claim is quite believable. He has not been charged with any crime. Instead, Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya was scooped up by the Israeli army when it committed the crime of destroying Kamal Adwan Hospital. Amnesty International calls for Abu Safiya's release.

Abu Safiya had written several opinion pieces in the New York Times. In the last one, published a few weeks before his arrest, he was described as the lead physician in Gaza for the humanitarian organization MedGlobal. He's a pediatrician but a few days earlier he had to perform the first surgery of his life. He wrote, "The human mind cannot imagine all the death and body parts and blood that surround us around the clock. But it remains our responsibility to keep on providing humanitarian services."

Last fall the Israeli military determined to empty the hospital. It bombarded parts of the facility and ordered it be evacuated. Abu Safiya and his medical staff refused. The attacks continued. His 15-year-old son Ibrahim was killed on hospital grounds by an Israeli drone. The doctor was seriously wounded in an attack inside the hospital suffering six shrapnel wounds to his leg. Finally, when it looked like the whole hospital would be leveled Dr. Abu Safiya agreed to leave. There's an amazing video of him walking through rubble into the maw of an Israeli armed personnel carrier.

Israeli authorities claim he's being held under suspicion of being a " Hamas terrorist operator." No evidence of any such activity has been made public. In February his attorney Gheed Kassem said Dr. Abu Safiya had been interrogated for 13 straight days and suffered torture including beatings with batons. In July the Israeli paper Haaretz quoted Kassem as saying, "jailers came into his cell and started to beat him. He was injured in the chin and back and is in pain. They also broke his glasses that I had managed to bring him on my previous visit. His cell is underground, depriving him and his cellmates of daylight."

There was hope in October that he might be freed. Instead, he was given another term of "administrative detention," that is prison without a charge, without any ability to refute accusations. In 1951 Israeli politician Menachem Begin denounced "administrative detention" as a "Nazi law." Decades later Begin became Israeli Prime Minister. Still administrative detention is handed out routinely. The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem says that as of this June more than 3,500 were in prison in this kind of incarceration.

There is fear Dr. Abu Safiya may die of his mistreatment. Mohamed Hussein Gawadreh died in an Israeli prison early in November. The 63-year-old man had been in administrative detention for a year.

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