

Sworn Statement

After having been warned to tell the truth and nothing but the truth or else I shall be subjected to penal action, I, the undersigned, Adham Khaled Ibrahim al-Habil, of Palestinian nationality, holder of ID No. 801715509, born on 8 August 1987, a fisherman and a resident of al-Shate' refugee camp, Gaza governorate, would like to declare the following:

My name is Adham Khaled Ibrahim al-Habil. I am 22-years-old, married, and father of one child. I work as a fisherman and live in al-Shate' refugee camp, west of Gaza city.

On Monday, 31 August 2009, my father, uncles and I performed the dawn prayers at 'Ibad al-Rahman Mosque in al-Shate' refugee camp. At around 6:00 am, we left for the Gaza port and prepared our fishing boats for sailing. My brother Muhammad, my cousin Ahmad Majed al-Habil, and colleagues Muhammad al-'Arayshi and Muhammad Salah Sa'dallah were waiting for us. We checked over the fishing boats and prepared the fishing tools. My brother Muhammad and I, along with Muhammad al-'Arayshi and Ahmad al-Habil, climbed on board my father's boat. The boat had the serial number 10466, measured 20 metres in length, 5.75 metres in width and was fully equipped with fishing tools. It cost USD 60,000.

As usual, we set out on our fishing journey at around 7:30 am. Having left the Gaza port gate, we sailed west for a distance of about 400 metres. Then, we cast the fishing nets and headed northwards. At that time, I saw Israeli navy boats to the west, at sea. I could hardly see them as they were far away. I should note that Israeli navy boats are constantly present at a remote distance at sea to patrol the Gaza coast. Usually, Israeli boats sail at a very high speed. Israeli navy officers arrest Palestinian fishermen, confiscate fishing boats, and open fire, forcing fishermen to leave and preventing them from fishing and making a living.

For half an hour, we continued to sail northwards and pulled the fishing nets along with us. We reached the area of al-Sudaniyya, west of Beit Lahiya, just over one kilometre from the northern territorial waters of Israel and 700 metres from the beach. There were another five fishing boats around us in the same area. We then adjusted the route of the boat, headed southwards, and sailed for a period of five minutes. It was 8:00 am then.

Suddenly, I heard the sound of boat engines. Israeli navy boats were sailing at a great speed towards us. When I looked back, I saw two navy boats with Israeli flags. They stopped at a distance of almost ten metres away from our boat. On each boat, I saw five soldiers carrying submachine guns and wearing green military uniforms. The Israeli soldiers opened heavy fire on our boats. Several bullets hit the boats belonging to my uncle 'Abd-al-Mu'ti Ibrahim al-Habil and Ayman 'Ali al-Habil. I saw bullets light red as they were fired from the soldiers' weapons. I also heard bullets hit our boats. Despite the fact that we waved to soldiers with our clothes so that they would not open fire, they fired several bullets on our boat, hitting the front part of the boat.

I continued to watch one of the Israeli navy boats, which was several metres away from us. Suddenly, I saw a soldier on board the boat carry a mortar and put it inside a projectile. He pointed the projectile towards our boat and launched the mortar. The burning mortar landed in the middle of our boat, setting it on fire. My colleagues and I were standing on the edge of the boat. We jumped into the sea and swam to Ayman 'Ali al-Habil's fishing boat, which was 20 metres away, and climbed aboard.

Later, I saw the two Israeli navy boats withdraw and sail westwards. On Ayman's boat, we sailed towards our boat and tried to extinguish the fire. However, we could not control the fire as the boat was burning rapidly. The fire also caught the fuel tanks. About 15 minutes later, I saw a large Israeli navy boat approach our burning boat. The Israeli navy officers used a small water pipe in an attempt to put out the fire, to no avail.

Several other fishing boats arrived and dragged our burning boat to the port. After we arrived at the beach, four Civil Defence fire trucks extinguished the fire. Then, we pulled the boat onto shore.

This is my declaration and hereby I sign, 31 August 2009.

Signature: Adham al-Habil

Name not withheld

Field researcher: Muhammad Abu-Rahma