

"If saving lives means I'm a traitor, so be it"

Khaled Abu Toameh, THE JERUSALEM POST

Sep. 24, 2004

Yunis Owaidah is probably the only Palestinian who's not afraid to admit that he is a "collaborator" with Israel. On the contrary, the 63-year-old father of 12 even boasts of the fact that he has been collaborating with Israel since 1967.

"I've saved the lives of many innocent people," Owaidah said in an interview at his home in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Ras el-Amud. "If saving the lives of innocent civilians means that I'm a traitor, so be it."

Thousands of Palestinians who have made similar confessions over the past three decades have been either killed or ostracized by their families and communities. The last killings occurred in Tulkarm on Monday, when two suspected collaborators in their mid-20s were executed by Fatah gunmen.

The executioners claimed that the two had confessed during interrogation to assisting Israel in hunting down and killing wanted activists. A week earlier, Fatah gunmen in Ramallah kidnapped a young man, also suspected of collaborating with Israel, as he was being escorted to court by Palestinian Authority security agents. The man's bullet-riddled body was later discovered near Al-Amari refugee camp south of Ramallah.

Oweidah, who has two wives and 46 grandchildren, has also been the target of several attempts on his life. Since the establishment of the PA in 1994, he has refrained from entering the West Bank.

"I only move around in safe areas and never leave the borders of Jerusalem," he said. "I'm wanted by the Palestinian Authority and I know that they won't waste an opportunity to kill me."

Owaidah's connections with Israel were first disclosed in the early 70s, when he helped thwart rocket attacks on the King David Hotel and the Western Wall. He is not prepared to talk about the role he played then, but says that his actions saved the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians.

"The Palestinians were then planning to fire rockets at the King David to kill [former US secretary of state Henry] Kissinger, who was staying there," he said. "The other rockets were supposed to hit the Western Wall. The rockets could have easily landed on the Aksa Mosque, killing many Arabs."

Back then, Owaidah was living in the Arab neighborhood of Abu Tor. A few years after the rocket attacks were foiled, he discovered a bomb attached to the door of his house. Police sappers detonated the bomb safely.

He then decided to move to Ras el-Amud, where he purchased a small piece of land and built a new home. Most of his neighbors have since been boycotting him and his family. "Their children still refuse to play with my children," he said. "Despite that, I have decided to stay here. I don't have any

plans to leave."

Owaidah, who works for a maintenance company at the Western Wall, said there was only one time when he seriously considered leaving Ras el-Amud. "In the year 2000, when [then-prime minister Ehud] Barak was talking about re-dividing Jerusalem and bringing the Palestinian Authority into the city, I started searching for a new house," he recalled. "I knew very well that I would not be able to live under Yasser Arafat or any other Arab regime."

Since the beginning of the intifada, masked gunmen have repeatedly threatened to kill Owaidah. In one incident, several shots were fired at his home from a distance, but no one was hurt. His eldest son, Sadek, was kidnapped twice to Jericho and Ramallah, but was released following heavy pressure from Israel.

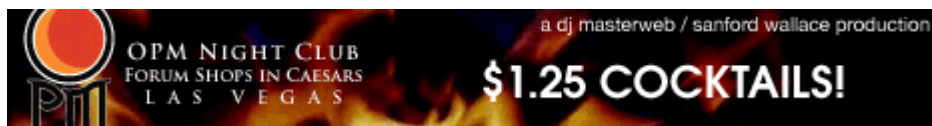
"He was brutally tortured by the Palestinian security services," the father pointed out. "But they were not after him. They are trying to get to me, and this is what they told my son. They even asked him to draw a sketch of the interior of the house and where I sleep."

In his bedroom, Owaidah keeps a pistol and hundreds of bullets. "You see this pistol?" he says as he brandishes the handgun. "I will not hesitate to use it if they come to get me. I will never surrender. I will kill 10 of them before they get their hands on me."

Asked if he was afraid nevertheless, in the wake of the continued killing of suspected collaborators, Owaidah retorted: "First of all, most of these people who are being killed are innocent and were never working for the Shin Bet. Secondly, I'm not afraid because I know that Israel is protecting me. If I call the police, they will be here in less than three minutes."

Owaidah explained that he decided to work with Israel "because of the injustice we saw when we were under Jordanian rule before the 1967 war."

"When the Jews came to Jerusalem, I saw how they were treating the people in a humane way," he said. "By comparison, we had been oppressed by the Jordanians when they were here. Look how the Jews have built a modern and democratic state, and look where the Arabs still are."



This article can also be read at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1095914106456&p=1078027574121>

[[Back to the Article](#)]

Copyright 1995-2004 The Jerusalem Post - <http://www.jpost.com/>