

CANADIAN NO ANSWERS IN NABI SHEET STORY:



2006 was to have been a happy year for Hussein Chokr and his family. Hussein had come to Canada from Lebanon to build a more secure and prosperous life for himself and his family. Early in 2006, he had begun to establish himself financially in Canada, and in March of that year, Canada finally granted him refugee protection, enabling him to apply for permanent residency in Canada. Soon after confirmation that his refugee application had been accepted, he spoke to his wife and each of his five children individually about joining him in Canada. While his wife and two of his children were naturally nervous at the prospect, the others looked forward to it eagerly. Hussein was anxious to have them join him in Canada, but could never have foreseen the danger and tragedy his family was soon to face in Lebanon.



Hussein Chokr, pictured several years ago with three of his children: Bilal (left), Mohamed and Talal. These three sons, another brother and their mother were all killed in an Israeli attack in July, 2006 for which there are still no answers.

A Proud and Prodigious Family

Hussein and his wife Khadija were extremely proud of their children. While he had been separated from them when he came to Canada, Hussein had watched his children grow up during nearly two decades in Saudi Arabia as he built a business supplying restaurants with foodstuffs. In 2006, they were intelligent and promising young adults: Mohammad 22-years-old, had graduated from law school, first in his class; Bushra, 21, a bright young woman; Bilal, 19, a first-year university accounting student, known in his community for his strong computer skills; Talal, 17, was a gifted artist who hoped to do a public exposition of his work once in Canada; Yassin, 15, had just received a full-tuition scholarship.



In happier times, clockwise from left: Khadija (Hussein's wife), Bushra (the only survivor), Mohammad (22 at the time of the attack), Talal (17), Yassin (15) and Bilal (19).

Outbreak of the Destruction of Lebanon

Hussein was naturally alarmed when war flared up between Israel and Hezbollah and Lebanon on July 12th, 2006. His family lived in Nabi Sheet, a village in the Beka' Valley in east-central Lebanon. Far from the terrible Israeli bombing campaigns taking place in the south of Lebanon and Beirut, Nabi Sheet was an unlikely place for an attack, though clearly a Shia' and predominantly Hezbollah-supportive region. As was his custom prior to the war, Hussein kept in daily touch with his family, and followed all the news from Lebanon carefully.

Tragically, barely a week into the Israel bombing campaign, Hussein received the terrible news that he so feared. A bombing had taken place in Nabi Sheet, and seven

people had been killed. His worst fears were confirmed when he was unable to reach any of his beloved family via phone or cellphone. A few hours later, he was able to confirm that – with the exception of his daughter Bushra – all of his family had been killed.

The air attack occurred just after 7:00 a.m. on July 19th, when a one-ton laser-guided bomb killed Hussein's family and two neighbours. Human Rights Watch (HRW) interviewed Hussein's daughter Bushra who explained that the entire family was sleeping when the attack occurred. She herself only woke up in the hospital, with severe injuries to her stomach and legs. Bushra as well as other people interviewed from the village insisted that the family had no involvement with Hezbollah, and all of the dead were buried as civilians, not as "martyrs" as with Hezbollah dead. HRW found no evidence of any militant activity in the area (e.g. dead militants, shells, or launchers, etc.)

Hussein's family's house was the only building struck in Nabi Sheet that day. (Only one other home in Nabi Sheet was bombed by Israel during the duration of the war.) According to HRW, Israel never provided any explanation as to why the Chokr home, or the people living in it might have been targeted. It is one of hundreds of Lebanese civilian deaths that occurred during Israel's assault for which answers were never provided. Hussein received no compensation for the death of his family or the destruction of his home, whether from Lebanon, Hezbollah, Israel, or any other countries in the region. Canada, along with many other Western countries did not push aggressively for a ceasefire, and Canada's government maintained throughout the war that Israel's assault was justified in "self defence." Canada ultimately offered \$30 million in aid to Lebanon following the war, i.e. less than one percent of the cost of the war to Lebanon.



The Chokr house, destroyed by an Israeli laser-guided bomb. One of only two houses in Nabi Sheet destroyed during the course of the war, Israel provided no justification for the attack.



Talal one of Hussein's sons lost in the tragedy was an aspiring artist at 17-years-old. Here, he depicts a rural pastoral scene from Lebanon, a far cry from the site of his home following July 19th.

Answers, not Charity

Hussein's story is one of heartbreak but also determination. "I don't want charity," he explained with resolute dignity. "I just want to be worthy of my children's memory by raising awareness. I want them to be proud of their father when I join them." Through his discussion, Chokr spoke about his admiration for Canada. He praised Canada as a humane society that recognizes the importance of individual respect and dignity unlike his previous home. Seemingly mundane aspects of Canadian society greatly impress Chokr, like the restrained behaviour of police and judicial recourse when citizens are wronged in a given situation. "You don't find this quality in people everywhere," Chokr continued, "I wanted my children to see it, that there was a place that respected human beings and the rule of law." He fought back tears as he gazed at a picture of them, "But now they'll never know what it's like to be in Canada".