

How the International Committee of the Red Cross Presents the Plight of a Palestinian Matriarch

by Hugh Fitzgerald



[Elder of Ziyon](#) has noticed that the International Committee of the Red Cross chose to tug at our heartstrings with a tweeted story about the indomitable matriarch of a Palestinian family. The story is here:

A poor old woman, pining to visit her son in prison, but she is being stopped. How sad.

Except that there is no difference between her and pretty much everyone else on the planet who cannot visit their relatives. What makes her situation any different? Prisoners in Israel can and do make phone calls, the same way we are

all getting by with phone calls. The COVID-19 restrictions are meant to save people like this old woman.

On first glance, this tweet seems like a gratuitous effort to keep the plight of Palestinian prisoners in the spotlight when the world has other issues to deal with.

Her inability to visit her son because of the coronavirus lockdown is, as Elder of Zion states, no different from what is being experienced by the tens of millions of prisoners all over the world whose relatives cannot visit them for the same reason: the need both to protect visitors, and the prisoners themselves, from spreading the coronavirus. This has now become a standard part of the coronavirus lockdown. But this “poor old woman” is presented by the ICRC as if she, and her imprisoned son, have been singled out to be the victims of an exceptional Israeli cruelty.

On second glance, this is much worse.

The unnamed woman was profiled by the ICRC last year, giving only her first name, Mayzouna. They did a photo essay on her visiting her son, where she told them that she lost her eyesight four years ago after a stroke but has not told her son when she visits him.

It seems when she was made the object of a photo essay by the ICRC, she told the moviemakers that she had “lost her eyesight” four years before, but still doesn’t tell her son when she visits him.” We are supposed to believe that for the four years she claims to have been blind, and visited her son once a month (nearly fifty times) during those years, he never noticed that she could not see. How was she even able to recognize him? And what about the ICRC people making the photo essay? Surely they noticed that Mayzouna had not lost her sight. The claim is preposterous – why did the ICRC pass it uncritically along?

Mayzouna is shown, in the same photo-essay, looking at three dresses, as if trying to decide which to wear (how could she do that if she is blind?) , staring out the window of the bus (why would a blind person look out the window?), and walking unaided and without any difficulty, sure of her footing, as would be impossible for a blind person. Clearly she made up the absurd story about losing her sight, and the ICRC readily accepted it, despite its own evidence to the contrary, to make her into an even more sympathetic victim of Israeli cruelty, which now prevents her from visiting her son. Of course Israeli coronavirus lockdown rules apply not just to Mayzouna, but to all prisoners, including Jewish ones. That's something the ICRC doesn't tell us.

A little research shows that this is Mayzouna Ben Srou, and the son she is visiting is Nasser Abu Srou, who along with his brother Mahmoud and another relative murdered a Shin Bet handler for yet another relative. In 2016, when 19-year old Abad al-Hamid Abu Srou killed himself with a bomb on a Jerusalem bus, the Times of Israel ran through the family history:

Abad al-Hamid Abu Srou [another family member] is not just another "lone wolf" terrorist. He was known to Palestinian security forces, and possibly the Israelis too; one of his family members was killed during recently during clashes with Israeli security forces not far from his home near Bethlehem.

His last name is well known among operatives in the Shin Bet security service: In January 1993, Maher Abu Srou, a Palestinian informant who comes from the same clan, along with two members of his family, Nasser and Mahmoud Abu Srou, killed his Shin Bet coordinator Chaim Nachmani...

"We are financially comfortable, you could say very comfortable," said his uncle Mahmoud Abu Srou, who was gathered with relatives in a courtyard at a family house in Bethlehem awaiting the return of his nephew's body so they

could bury him.

Abu Scour's teenage cousins listened to their uncles speak but kept silent. They wore pricey watches, skinny jeans and fancy sneakers.

Mayzouna is part of a family that is not poor, not desperate and quite well-off.

Even though some of them still choose to live in the Aida "refugee camp" where UNRWA provides free housing.

The story doesn't end there. Mayzouna is a celebrity, a go-to person for interviews by dozens of news outlets, as a symbol of Palestinian suffering.

*She spoke to Russia Today about being a witness to the "Nakba." She told Mondoweiss that money from the PLO paid for Nasser's bachelors and masters degrees from Hebrew University while in prison and **how the family couldn't afford for him to even buy olive oil from the prison canteen if it wasn't for the program now known as "pay for slay."** Only last month she described how she is dealing with being under closure for the pandemic and she told Arab media that no one should complain about being in quarantine since her son has been in prison for 27 years.*

In 2018, she was scheduled to travel to Ireland to speak about the plight of the Palestinians. The PLO has sent high-ranking officials to honor her for mothering a terrorist.

This is who the ICRC is choosing to highlight as an example of the cruelty of the Israelis and the coronavirus.

The ICRC chooses to suggest that Israel, in preventing Mayzouna from visiting her imprisoned son, has acted with extreme cruelty. But that's absurd; the same regulations apply to the relatives of Jewish prisoners. All over the world, in coronavirus-stricken countries, families have been prevented

from visiting imprisoned relatives, as an effective way to limit the infection from spreading, both among prisoners, and among their relatives.

The Srour family, of which Mayzouna Ben Srour is the proud matriarch, has been deeply involved in terrorism. Several years ago one of Mayzouna's relatives was killed in an attack on Israeli police. In 2016 the 19-year old Abad al-Hamid Abu Srour killed himself with a bomb on a Jerusalem bus. The matriarch's clan includes her two sons, Nasser Abu Srour and Mahmoud Abu Srour, and Maher Abu Srour. The three of them murdered Chaim Nachmani, the Shin Bet handler of yet another member of the Abu Srour clan.

Mayzouna is, then, matriarch of no ordinary family but, rather, of a family of terrorist murderers. At least a half-dozen members of the Abu Srour family have been killed or imprisoned for terrorist attacks. She has never expressed the slightest dismay with their acts. She is the proud mother of two terrorist murderers, and the aunt – also proud – of at least three other murderers. She's a star in the anti-Israel firmament, sent to speak abroad about the "plight of the Palestinians."

The ICRC also attempts to present Mayzouna as sympathetically as it can. It makes no mention of the many terrorist murderers in her family. It also uncritically accepts her claim that she has been blind for the past four years. The ICRC itself has provided photos that show this "blind" lady looking out a bus window, holding up colorful gowns to choose from, and walking unaided, without the least difficulty. In presenting her so sympathetically, in failing to mention the many terrorists of the Abu Srour clan, only referring to Nasser, the son she had wanted to visit, as a "prisoner" without providing information about why he was in prison, the ICRC abandons its pretense of being a humanitarian aid group that is resolutely neutral in political conflicts.

The ICCS has thus presents Mayzouna Ben Srou as the admirable matriarch of a Palestinian family – close-knit, prosperous – without any mention of the many murderers among them, including two of her sons. And though she lost – or so we are asked to believe – her eyesight four years ago, she bravely soldiers on. All she wants now – is it really so much to ask? –is to visit her son Nasser, a prisoner of the cruel Israelis, who have made things crueler still by not allowing her that visit prompted by a mother's love.

The ICRC has a lot of explaining to do. Why did it fail to mention the half-dozen terrorist-murderers in the Srou family? Why did it fail to mention that Nasser Abu Srou and his brother took part in a cold-blooded murder? Why did it accept, instead of challenging, Mayzouna's claim that she lost her sight four years ago? And why doesn't the ICRC explain that it is not just in Israel that relatives of prisoners are not being allowed to visit them during this coronavirus pandemic, but also in the U.S. (where Federal and many state prisons now ban visits), and in many other countries as well.

The ICRC claims to observe, as sacrosanct, the principle of political neutrality. But it has not always done so. when it comes to Israel and the Palestinians. If the ICRC wants to recover its reputation in this area of its operations, it should cease offering these advertisements for the "Palestinian people," and stop presenting the proud mother and aunt of murderers in a sympathetic light. The ICRC could try telling the truth and, as someone in Palestine once said, "the truth shall make you free."

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