**A business trip to Egypt becomes a nightmare**

A Gazan who travels to Egypt for work purposes finds himself trapped away from family and in anguish about their fate.

In the early hours of a September night in 2023, I sit at my desk, pen in hand, capturing the essence of my life’s most important dreams and aspirations. At the top of my list is a journey to Egypt to continue my father’s legacy by expanding our family’s business in the luggage and bag trade.

My father was renowned throughout Gaza for selling the best collection of all kinds of bags — for kids, school, and travel; it was the oldest such business in the Strip.

By mid-month, I have moved to Egypt, a country deeply cherished by Palestinians. My days are filled with strategic planning and business meetings, aiming to learn about the latest products and establish contacts with key factories and shops to enhance our business upon my return to Gaza.

However, just a few days into my stay, the peaceful pursuit of my dreams transforms into a nightmare.

### ****The outbreak of war****

On the morning of October 7, at precisely six o’clock Jerusalem time, the drums of war resound. Israel launches a fierce and unprecedented assault on Gaza. Unlike previous escalations in conflict, this war’s intensity is staggering.

I vividly remember the moment when my housemate and friend frantically told me, “Gaza is ablaze!” We were awake early,  about to go to Alexandria for a business meeting. He had just watched videos of Israel’s bombing. My heart races, and my mind is overwhelmed with confusion and dread. What was happening? How could this be?

Rushing out of my room, I glue myself to the news, clutching my phone, desperately trying to contact my family back in Gaza. Their voices on the other end of the line are filled with terror and uncertainty. Events are unfolding at a breakneck pace, with urgent “breaking news alerts” cascading in rapid succession. No one around me knows what is truly happening.

### ****The descent into chaos — and silence****

Within hours, Israel’s attacks intensify. My phone buzzes incessantly with horrifying updates: fire belt attacks, evacuations, casualties littering the streets, the wounded everywhere. Dismembered bodies scattered around. All of this occurs in mere minutes.

Each subsequent attempt to contact my family that day fails; the communication towers in Gaza have been disabled by the Israeli strikes.

That night, sleep eludes me. My mind is consumed with fear for my family’s safety. Are they unharmed? Have they managed to escape? Are they still in their home, or have they fled to somewhere safer? My thoughts are a whirlwind of worry, with no answers to soothe my anxiety.

As dawn breaks the next day, I finally receive a message from my older brother, Mekawy. They are  safe. He reassures me there is no need for me to worry. Relief washes over me. Albeit temporarily.

I resolve to return to Gaza, feeling that my presence in Egypt is  now futile. After multiple attempts, I manage to inform my family of my plan to come back. However, this hope to return is quickly dashed as the border between Egypt and Gaza is sealed off.

Days turn into weeks, each one more harrowing than the last. I sit on the couch, eyes glued to the TV, tears drying up from constant crying, my heart numb from incessant pain, and my mind paralyzed by the relentless onslaught of grim news. Nothing is as it should be.

Then, all communication with my family ceases entirely. For 13 agonizing days, I have no word from them. No clue of their fate.

### ****Struggling with helplessness****

The silence is unbearable. Every passing hour feels like an eternity. I oscillate between despair and a faint glimmer of hope. I imagine my family huddled together, seeking refuge from the incessant bombings.

The images on the news are a constant torment: children crying, families torn apart, buildings reduced to rubble. My heart aches for Gaza and our resilient people, enduring yet another cycle of senseless violence.

I seek solace in the camaraderie of fellow Palestinians in Egypt. We share stories, tears, and prayers, drawing strength from one another. Only miles away from our homes, our collective pain creates an unbreakable bond.

The Palestinian community in Egypt mobilizes quickly, organizing protests, raising funds, and sending aid to Gaza. We are determined to do everything within our power to support our homeland.

In the midst of the chaos, I meet numerous Palestinians who have been displaced, their stories echoing my own fears and frustrations. Their resilience and unwavering hope inspire me. Together, we are navigating the complexities of refugee life, finding ways to cope with the trauma of colonization. Our shared experiences became a source of strength, a testament to the enduring spirit of the Palestinian people.

Despite the break in communication with home, I continue to document in my journal my thoughts and emotions. Writing becomes a therapeutic outlet, helping me process the overwhelming grief and anxiety. Each entry is a cathartic release, a way to make sense of the senseless violence that has disrupted our lives.

### ****A ray of light****

On the thirteenth day of my agonizing wait, I finally receive a message from my family. They are safe, although the situation remains dire. The relief is indescribable, yet it is tempered by the knowledge that many others are not as fortunate. The war has left an indelible mark on Gaza, and the road to recovery will be long and arduous.

With renewed determination, I focus on how I can help rebuild. I intensify my efforts in Egypt, networking with donors and securing funding for Gaza.

Through the darkest times, our dreams endure. They are the light that guides us, the hope that sustains us, and the promise of a better future for Gaza and its people. The journey is far from over, but together, we will rebuild, we will recover, and we will continue to dream.