

Stress-induced heart attack claims life of Baptist in Gaza conflict

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GAZA (ABP)—Casualties during eight days of fighting between Israel and the militant group Hamas in the Gaza Strip included at least one Baptist.

Salem Boulos Sweilem, who attended the Gaza Baptist Church in Gaza City, died Nov. 19 of an apparent heart attack triggered by stress during a nearby bombing that shook his home.



Funeral service of Salem Boulos, a Baptist in Gaza who was killed during the recent war between Israel and Hamas (BWANet Photo)

Hanna Massad, the pastor of Gaza Baptist Church who lives in exile due to conflicts and tensions in that part of the Palestinian territory, said the father of five who worked as a carpenter had open-heart surgery about 10 years ago, but since then was in good health.

A blog by [Caritas Internationalis](#), a Catholic humanitarian group that runs a health center in a refugee camp located near Salem's home, said he felt exhausted and frustrated that day from lack of sleep due to nonstop bombing, and went to bed to get some rest.

That night, Israeli warplanes dropped four one-ton bombs on nearby Palestine Stadium, and the blast caused Salem's building to shake. When he awoke in a panic and couldn't breathe, his family wanted to take him to a hospital but had no transportation.

They finally found a neighbor who had a car, but by then it was too late. He died while on the way to the hospital.

More than 160 Palestinians were killed during eight days leading up to a ceasefire announced Nov. 21. Palestinian sources said half were civilians, and about 30 were children. More than 1,200 people were wounded.

Gaza Baptist Church, one of three Christian churches and the only evangelical congregation among the 1.7 million people in Gaza, has been caught in the crossfire of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before.

The church founded in the 1950s has been subjected to arson, damaged by nearby bomb blasts and commandeered as an observation post by warring factions.

In October 2007, one of Gaza Baptist Church's leaders, a Christian bookstore manager named Rami Ayyad, was kidnapped and murdered by unidentified Islamic militants.

Massad, pastor of the church since 1999 and advised by authorities to relocate to ensure safety for himself and his family, described Ayyad as a martyr who was executed for refusing to renounce his faith in addresses at the New Baptist Covenant gatherings in 2008 in Atlanta and Norman, Okla., in 2009.

Massad now runs [Christian Mission 2 Gaza](#) in Jordan and makes periodic visits to deliver aid and encourage members of Gaza Baptist Church and the [Palestinian Bible Society](#).