

INTERNATIONAL
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Kin of killed Hamas leader to surgery in Israel

The Associated Press

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HOLON, Israel: A 6-year-old Palestinian boy whose powerful relative was assassinated by Israel during its recently ended offensive in the Gaza Strip has checked into an Israeli hospital for life-saving heart surgery.

Abdullah Siam was brought to Wolfson Medical Center near Tel Aviv on Tuesday to repair a hole in his heart through Save a Child's Heart, an Israel-based project that treats children suffering from cardiac problems in conflict zones or areas where medical facilities are below par.

Nearly half of the 2,100 children who have been treated since the project was launched in 1996 have been Palestinian, including 600 from Gaza, the group says. The program has survived the hostilities between Hamas-ruled Gaza and the Jewish state, including the devastating three-week war that ended on Jan. 18.

Save a Child's Heart has worked with children from Gaza through the years when Palestinian militants were blowing up Israeli buses and is "treating them when Gaza is now bad," Dr. Lior Sasson, head of cardiothoracic surgery at Wolfson, said Wednesday. "We will continue to do it because what we believe is that a kid is a kid is a kid and needs to be treated regardless (of) the political situation."

Palestinians in Gaza generally are barred from entering Israel for security reasons but some patients with severe medical conditions are granted entry. Abdullah had been seen by doctors in Israel before and had been scheduled for surgery in November, but the operation was delayed, and then the war disrupted the entry of humanitarian cases.

"The circumstances were difficult," Abdullah's mother, Houda, said about the battles. "The army came to our neighborhood, but we were a little far away. But we heard the shelling and the bullets and everything."

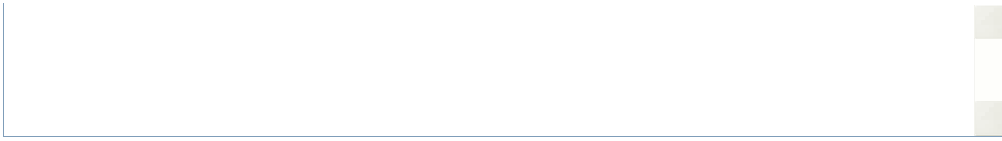
Abdullah, clad in pajamas with a Spiderman shirt underneath, stood shyly as the doctor examined him. His mother, Houda Siam, said Israel was "the only place, the only way he can undergo this operation."

The boy is a distant relative of Said Siam, a top Hamas leader in Gaza who was killed in an Israeli airstrike near the end of the war. Siam was a key figure in the group's violent takeover of the Palestinian territory in 2007. As interior minister, he was widely feared for cracking down on Hamas' Fatah opponents.

Houda Siam said she never met her relative, and a spokeswoman for Save a Child's Heart said the group was not aware of the family tie before the boy arrived in Israel.

Correction:

Notes:



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