



Peter Fast, International CEO, comforts Zohar resident, Aryeh Yaron, who's daughter was murdered on October 7. Shir Yaron (insert) died alongside her fiancé after Hamas terrorists shot them at point-blank range.

Michio Nagata/bridgesforpeace.com - Aryeh Yaron

Chaim's heart pounded as he exited the gates of Zohar and steered his pickup cautiously along the familiar road. As the head of security for the tiny community near the Gaza border, he and his deputy would serve as a makeshift barrier between the attacking hordes and the families in Zohar. They drove, weapons loaded and ready, as hundreds of missiles, fired from Gaza into Israel, streaked through the air while the Red Alert siren blared.

It was early morning October 7, and from the moment the attack started at 6:29 a.m., Chaim knew it wasn't just missiles. Together with his deputy, he went on the offensive, taking the fight out of the community.

Chaim was well aware of just how vulnerable the people in Zohar would be to a full-scale attack. Although the community is located only 3 miles [5 km.] from Gaza, it lacked a security team, with Chaim and his deputy the only armed defenders. Moreover, because most of Zohar's homes were built in the 1970s during a time of terrible poverty, none of the residences had safe rooms. As a result, when missile attacks came, the 600 residents of Zohar would rush from their homes to the twelve public bomb shelters

located around the community—all old structures with no lights, air conditioning or bathrooms.

These public shelters were all constructed similarly: a doorway leading to a narrow flight of stairs descending into the square, cement safe room underground, with the last person in shutting the steel door. However, because the shelters were designed as a place of safety from rockets, not terrorists, the steel doors had no locks.

During rocket attacks in the past, the people of Zohar would crowd into the shelters, leaving little room to move. They would then wait 10–20 minutes before returning home. But October 7 would be different. This time, the missiles didn't stop. Barrage after barrage rained down as terrified families with screaming children huddled in utter darkness for hours.

Meanwhile, Chaim and his deputy were outside Zohar's gates, ready for the terrorists coming in the wake of the rockets. They came as a horde of 80 heavily armed Hamas terrorists zooming in on the tiny community. Chaim identified them as an Iranian-trained, Hamas Nakba unit, trained to fan out in an attempt to flank the Israeli security pickup truck coming towards them. Chaim slammed on the breaks and turned the truck at a 45-degree angle. Zohar's security team of two leapt out of the truck as the terrorists began firing rapidly at them and sought shelter behind the vehicle. They began returning fire, knowing that if they were killed, the people of Zohar would be slaughtered.

Miraculously, Chaim and his deputy survived. Intimidated and demoralized by the two Israeli warriors defending the road to Zohar, the terrorists retreated, leaving behind a dozen of their dead. Chaim and his deputy praised God for their lives, but the day was far from over.



A public bomb shelter in Zohar

Michio Nagata/bridgesforpeace.com

Throughout the day and into the night, Chaim fought terrorists along the Gaza periphery, encountering hundreds of burned cars and the bodies of young Israelis everywhere, many gunned down or burned alive in their vehicles as they tried to flee. Among them, he discovered the body of his brother-in-law riddled with bullets and hanging partially out of his car. In the backseat, he found his best friend and his best friend's fiancée, a beautiful young woman named Shir Yaron, slumped forward and lifeless. Thanks to the bravery of Chaim and his deputy, Zohar had not been infiltrated and destroyed, but six of its residents were murdered on the road outside the community.

Bridges for Peace had the privilege of meeting Chaim through a community leader named Yaniv, who loves the people of Zohar. We heard Chaim's heroic story firsthand as he showed us the awful video footage of that day. Yaniv walked us through the community, pointing out dilapidated homes surrounded by sidewalks encroached by weeds and decay. We stood silently before a memorial to the murdered victims in the village's community center, paying our respects, our hearts shattered as we saw the pictures of the beautiful individuals who were murdered simply for being Jewish. Finally, we witnessed the terrible conditions of the bomb shelters.



We now know the extent of October 7. Over 1,300 Israelis murdered, hundreds kidnapped into Gaza and thousands wounded. Zohar was part of that terrible day. The community survived because the Lord God of Israel filled Chaim and his deputy with courage and strength to defend the helpless. At the same time, Zohar is in deep mourning for those who never made it home.

As we, the Christians of Bridges for Peace stood in Zohar, offering our help, Yaniv shared, "When people come here and talk about dreams, it gives me hope." He hugged me, praising God that we had come. We told him and other Zohar residents about Christians from around the world who stand with Israel, pray for Israel and seek to love what God loves. More times than I can recall, Yaniv replied "Amen" or "*Baruch HaShem*" (Blessed is the Name) as I informed him that Bridges for Peace would like to support Zohar. After we departed, Yaniv called me in tears, saying that once we had left, the Zohar residents started praising God, rejoicing, "Finally people see us! Finally they care! We're not alone!"

Bridges for Peace wants to lift this community up from poverty and trauma to demonstrate the love of God to them through our partnership. Our desire is to repair a clubhouse for the youth, upgrade the bomb shelters, invest in the education of Zohar's children and assist with gardening and community projects so that the people of Zohar will experience Christian love like never before. Our plan starts now! Together, let's leave our mark on this beautiful community in the south of Israel near the Gaza Strip. Let's remind them that they are not alone. Please partner with Bridges for Peace to help the people of Zohar.

With hope and expectation,
 Rev. Peter Fast
 International CEO

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