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'If this photo can't change the world, why are we photographers?': Palestinian photojournalist Samar Abu Elouf on her 2025 World Press Photo win

2025 World Press Photo of the Year winner Samar Abu Elouf reflects on the power of her photography to change the world and stop the ongoing genocide in Gaza

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Mouneb Taim (/taxonomy/term/72741) | 25 April, 2025

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Palestinian photojournalist Samar Abu Elouf (<https://www.instagram.com/samarabuelouf/?hl=en>)'s face glistened with tears as she stood beneath the arches of De Nieuwe Kerk (https://www.nieuwekerk.nl/?gad_source=1&gbraid=0AAAAADoF5IqjFsOpHMPGDMf9gaNy1JidQ&gclid=CjwKCAjwwqfABhBcEiwAZJjC3kOrMNwBN6c-qGoy24z_N2CsnFQdYQuYICDNZP3fwhqzekdT2T939xoCxcgAQAvD_BwE) in Amsterdam, gazing at the photograph that had earned her global recognition.

The image, chosen from over 59,320 entries submitted by 3,778 photojournalists worldwide, was not just a winning photo but a statement from a place enduring immense hardship: Gaza.

Standing in front of her photograph, Samar spoke in Arabic, sharing a message that resonated across languages: "I truly hope this photo can change the world or stop the war. And if it cannot... why are we even photographers today?"

Her words were translated by Taghreed El-Khodary (https://www.instagram.com/taghreed_elkhodary/), a fellow Palestinian journalist, ensuring the message reached everyone in the room.

Among those present was Joumana El Zein Khoury (<https://www.newarab.com/Joumana%20El%20Zein%20Khoury>), Executive Director of the World Press Photo Foundation. Originally from Lebanon, Joumana was visibly moved by Samar's speech, a reminder of the shared understanding among those who recognise the power of visual storytelling.

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A tribute to a friend ٤

Samar began her speech at the World Press Photo exhibition in London, sharing the story of her close friend and colleague, [Ihab Al-Burdaini](#). [fbid=9450518868336402&set=a.24'](#)

A Palestinian photojournalist from Gaza, Ihab Al-Burdaini was killed in an Israeli airstrike that hit a press tent in Khan Younis on 7 April.

Her voice trembled as she shared the painful news with the audience: "My joy is incomplete. One of my dearest friends, photojournalist Ihab Al-Burdaini, was injured in Khan Younis. I do not want to lose him. I do not want him to come back this way.

"It is hard for me to stand here today. It is hard to celebrate when a piece of shrapnel — a bullet, a fragment of a rocket — is in his head. He is in a coma. He has lost one of his eyes.

"There is no medical treatment available inside Gaza. Hospitals are bombed, crossings are closed, and food is scarce. He cannot leave Gaza to receive the treatment he desperately needs.

Tears streamed down her face as she continued: "Speaking about him today — this is the least I can do. I want him to see his loved ones again. I hope he receives the help he deserves."



Samar Abu Elouf pictured with Taghreed El-Khodary and Joumana El Zein Khoury [Mouneb Taim]

'How will I hug you now?'

When Samar finally introduced herself to the audience, her voice was filled with emotion: "My name is Samar Abu Elouf. I am a photojournalist from Gaza City, and I work with *The New York Times* as a freelancer. Given the tragic situation my family continues to face in Gaza, I find it hard to feel much joy."

She went on, remembering her family back in Gaza: "It has been a very difficult time for me to be far from them. I miss them so much and wish they could have shared this moment with me. I dream of being reunited with them."

Turning to the photograph that had captured global attention, Samar spoke about the subject of her haunting image, Mahmoud (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crm347kpljko>).

"I was nervous when I first met Mahmoud. My heart was heavy. I didn't know how to approach photographing him. What mattered most to me was to listen to him and understand what he had been through," Samar shared.

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Reflecting on a heartbreaking moment, Samar recalled what Mahmoud's mother had told her: "Right after he was injured, Mahmoud asked me to run for safety with his sister and leave him behind, thinking he was going to die. But I refused to leave him. When he woke up, one of the first things he asked was, 'How will I hug you now?'"

Looking ahead, Samar shared that Mahmoud now dreams of receiving prosthetic limbs to ease the pain from his injury. “He hopes to regain some sense of normalcy, but his prosthetics will need to be replaced as his body continues to grow — a constant reminder of his struggles and resilience.”



Palestinian photographer wins 2025 World Press Photo



Samar won the World Press Photo of the Year for her image of nine-year-old Mahmoud Ajjour, who lost both arms in an Israeli attack

Changing the world through photography

For many, Samar’s emotional speech conveyed not only the human cost of war but also the incredible strength of the human spirit captured in her photo.

As Samar stood before her award-winning photograph at the ceremony, a moment she had long dreamed of, she spoke with a mix of pride and sadness: “This award means everything to me,” she said, her voice heavy. “But it’s a bittersweet moment because I’m far from Gaza and my family. I wish they could be here to share in this joy with me.”

Her words carried the weight of her experience as a photojournalist: “Documenting the lives of wounded Palestinians was both an honour and a painful experience. Many have lost limbs, families, and hope. The children, orphaned and left behind, heal without their parents by their side.”

Samar stressed that her recognition was not just for her work, but for the importance of telling these untold stories: “I hope my work can raise awareness of the suffering in Gaza, especially the children like Mahmoud, who lost both arms in an airstrike while fleeing his home. His dream now is to receive prosthetics to help him lead a better life.”

Samar’s commitment to her craft was clear as she spoke about Mahmoud’s journey, saying, "I hope he receives the treatment he needs, and that my photographs will help change the world — or at the very least, stop the war."

Grateful for the honour, she thanked the *World Press Photo* committee, saying, "This recognition isn't just for me — it's for the countless voices that remain unheard, for those living with the scars of war. I hope that my work will draw more attention to their suffering and the resilience of Gaza's people."



Samar is pictured giving a speech at De Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam [Mouneb Taim]

A dual honour

On the same day, Samar received the prestigious [OPC Award](https://www.instagram.com/p/DIIrVJbslCf/?img_index=1) (https://www.instagram.com/p/DIIrVJbslCf/?img_index=1) for her work with *The New York Times*, winning the Olivier Rebbot Award for best photographic news reporting from abroad in any medium, specifically for her coverage of Gaza.

The judges praised her work, saying: “The quality of the images is exceptional. Abu Elouf’s sensitive and wrenching portraits capture the unimaginable cost of the war on human lives, especially children. These photographs are not just a testament to the resilience of the human spirit but also a reminder of the devastating consequences of conflict.”

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Reflecting on her achievements, Samar said: “When I was in Gaza, I truly wanted to capture an image that could change the world or stop the war. Today, that goal remains the same — to bring this message to the world. The most important thing to me, beyond all the awards, is that the war stops. My heart and mind are with my family in Gaza, not here in Amsterdam. I hope the war ends, for their sake and the sake of all those suffering.”

Joumana highlighted the power of the image, describing it as “silent yet deeply compelling.”

She added: “It captures the story of one boy, but also speaks to the broader, devastating consequences of a war that will leave scars on generations to come.”

The award organisers also noted Mahmoud’s simple but profound wish: “He dreams of receiving prosthetic limbs so he can live a life like any other child.”

In a show of solidarity, Samar has supported a fundraising campaign to provide Mahmoud with the prosthetics he urgently needs, going beyond her role as a photojournalist to directly impact the lives of those she photographs.

Standing with Joumana and Taghreed, Samar ended her speech with a moving reflection: “If this photo can’t change the world, then why do we capture these moments? I want this photo to make a difference. I want it to bring an end to this war. If it can’t, then what is the purpose of our work?”

'How long will this holocaust continue?'

Alongside Samar's work, Palestinian photographer [Ali Jadallah](https://www.worldpressphoto.org/ali-jadallah#:~:text=Ali%20Hassan%20Jadallah%20is%20a,Strip%20for%20over%2013%20years.) (https://www.worldpressphoto.org/ali-jadallah#:~:text=Ali%20Hassan%20Jadallah%20is%20a,Strip%20for%20over%2013%20years.)'s powerful series, *Gaza Under Israeli Attack* (https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo-contest/2025/Ali-Jadallah/7#:~:text=Ali%20Hassan%20Jadallah%20is%20a,Gaza%2C%20delivering%20po...), was also featured at the exhibition, with his haunting images continuing to capture the ongoing [genocide in Gaza](https://www.newarab.com/tag/gaza-genocide) (https://www.newarab.com/tag/gaza-genocide).



'Gaza Under Israeli Attack' by Palestinian photographer Ali Jadallah [Mouneb Taim]

One German guest, Natalie, who had attended specifically to see Ali’s work, expressed her sorrow: “How long will this holocaust continue?”

Calling for an end to the genocide, she added, "What happened in history to the Jews is happening again now, and I am ashamed of this. But it must end."

Natalie also explained why she was present: “I came here specifically for Gaza’s work. Last year, I attended the exhibition when Mohammed Salem’s photograph *A Palestinian Woman Embraces the Body of Her Niece* was shown. It affected me deeply. And now, once again, I find myself here. Will we continue to witness massacres against Palestinians year after year in the World Press Photo exhibition?”

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Her voice trembled with emotion as she repeats year after year while the work gaza-genocide-we-need-talk).

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'A Palestinian Woman Embraces the Body of Her Niece' by Palestinian photojournalist Mohammed Salem [Mouneb Taim]

For the consecutive year, Gaza's ongoing suffering has dominated the prestigious *World Press Photo's* 'Photo of the Year' award. Photographers continue to highlight the voices of their people, especially in the West, where their stories resonate most, overshadowing the work of photographers from around the world.

Mouneb Taim is a producer and journalist from Damascus, Syria. He was awarded TPOTY's Photographer of the Year and ICFJ's Best Young Male Journalist in 2020



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In Sudan's capital, a deteriorating humanitarian and economic crisis leaves no one safe as crime and violence skyrocket

Amid Sudan's collapsing security and economy, armed robberies and looting are now routine, leaving people with no choice but to surrender their belongings



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At 10:30 am on a late February, on a crowded street in [Omdurman \(https://www.newarab.com/tag/omdurman\)](https://www.newarab.com/tag/omdurman), Sudan’s second-largest city, Namareq Abdallah and her sister were walking home from the bustling Sabereen market, their bags heavy with groceries, when two armed men in army uniforms pulled up on a motorcycle. The men demanded they hand over their handbags — containing their phones and cash — which they then snatched and sped away.

Despite the many witnesses, no one intervened. The sisters didn’t resist either.

“We were too scared they’d shoot us,” Namareq recalls.

A deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation in Sudan, on the back of its [ongoing civil war \(https://www.newarab.com/tag/sudan-war\)](https://www.newarab.com/tag/sudan-war), has created one of the world’s worst crises.

More than [30 million people now require assistance \(https://www.newarab.com/news/over-30-million-need-aid-war-torn-sudan-un\)](https://www.newarab.com/news/over-30-million-need-aid-war-torn-sudan-un) — the highest number ever recorded, [according \(https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/humanitarian-crisis-sudan-statement-humanitarian-coordination-forum-hcf\)](https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/humanitarian-crisis-sudan-statement-humanitarian-coordination-forum-hcf) to the UN’s humanitarian office, OCHA.

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This collapse has fueled a surge in robberies and violent crime, as law and order disintegrate. Despite recent gains by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in capturing territories it lost earlier in the two-year conflict, theft and robberies are still rampant.

Sudan’s civil war began as a power struggle between the SAF, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary [Rapid Support Forces \(https://www.newarab.com/tag/rsf\)](https://www.newarab.com/tag/rsf) (RSF), commanded by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti. The war has since spread across the country, killing thousands of civilians and displacing nearly 12 million people, of whom roughly 9 million are internally displaced according to UN estimates, which also describes this as one of the world’s largest internal displacement crises.

Security has crumbled, and economic hardship has worsened, leaving gangs and militias to roam freely, looting homes, businesses, and even humanitarian aid convoys. For many, staying safe means surrendering their belongings rather than risking their lives.

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[Fleeing war, gendered violence follows Sudanese women to Egypt \(https://www.newarab.com/features/fleeing-war-gendered-violence-follows-sudanese-women-egypt\)](https://www.newarab.com/features/fleeing-war-gendered-violence-follows-sudanese-women-egypt)

Sudanese women Javier Jennings Mozo & Alejandro Matrán

Although some Sudanese welcomed recent SAF victories — regaining control over parts of Khartoum and forcing the RSF from strategic locations — crime continues.

In late March, unidentified assailants looted Al-Bashaer Hospital, a vital facility in southern Khartoum, after RSF forces had been driven out.

Amid absent law and order in regions recaptured by the army, gangsters and criminals continue their looting, unaffected by the significantly changing military developments.



The worsening humanitarian and economic situation in Sudan has led to a surge in robberies and violent crime [Getty]

Nowhere is safe

Having been displaced more than once by the conflict, 28-year-old Namareq has experienced insecurity in areas under both warring sides. In August 2023, as fighting intensified in her Khartoum neighbourhood, she fled to Wad Madani (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wad_Madani), the capital of Al Jazirah state, 180 kilometres south of Khartoum.

But when the RSF seized Wad Madani in December 2023, she decided to return to Khartoum, hoping home would be safer. Instead, she found the situation had worsened.

By February 2024, airstrikes and artillery shelling escalated in southern Khartoum as the Sudanese army fought to reclaim the area. RSF fighters, retreating toward Darfur and Kordofan, raided markets and homes, looting whatever they could before withdrawing.

Fearing for her safety, Namareq moved again, this time to Karari, an SAF-controlled locality in Omdurman. But even there, she and her sister were robbed in broad daylight.

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Omar Ibrahim Henry, a volunteer with an emergency response group in South Khartoum, describes the situation as “catastrophic.” Armed robberies and kidnappings have become routine.

“Citizens living south of the belt are forced to stay there, relying on charity kitchens for their daily sustenance — often surviving on one meal a day,” Henry told *The New Arab*.

“Yet, it’s this state of destitution that is also causing frequent raids on homes and looting of household supplies, with militias and gangs targeting families’ wheat flour, rice, and lentils.”

According to emergency response groups in neighbourhoods retaken by the army in recent weeks, such as the Kafouri neighbourhood in Bahri locality and the New Hilla neighbourhood in western Khartoum, residents have accused army personnel of looting their homes after they were evacuated to safe areas.

These residents say they’ve later found their belongings, including washing machines, refrigerators, and household furniture, for sale in the stolen goods markets (https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=964384545798406&id=100066806073173&rid=ZFzEdkIQBn6Mromr#) of Souk Sabreen in Omdurman.

Army and police officials refused to comment when asked by *The New Arab* for comments on the allegations.

An economy in freefall

The rise in crime isn’t just about lawlessness — it’s driven by economic collapse, according to human rights defenders. With supply chains disrupted and prices soaring, basic necessities are out of reach for many.

In RSF-controlled areas, a kilo of sugar costs 5,000 Sudanese pounds (SDG) — about \$2 at the current parallel-market exchange rate of 2,500 SDG per US dollar. Lentils are 6,000 SDG per kilo, cooking oil reaches 7,400 SDG per litre, and beef costs 17,000 SDG per kilo. Even onions have become a luxury, occasionally disappearing from markets altogether.

Meanwhile, in SAF-controlled areas such as parts of Bahri and Omdurman, prices are slightly lower due to the army’s control over supply routes in the north and east, as well as the resumption of some agricultural production.

Many families now rely solely on remittances from relatives abroad.

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“Salaries for government workers in RSF-controlled zones have been halted since the war started,” said Mohamed Jumaa, a government employee.

The collapse of public transportation has made daily life even harder. Tuk-tuk rickshaw drivers, frequently targeted by armed thieves, have stopped working, leaving residents with few options besides donkey carts.

Hospitals, like Yarmouk Voluntary Health Centre, south of Khartoum, which relies on volunteer medical staff, were also robbed on February 20, 2025, exacerbating the challenges it faces in providing free medical services. The ongoing looting has also led to the closure of most pharmacies, making it difficult to obtain medication.



In areas controlled by the RSF, the price of lentils has now reached 6,000 SDG per kilogram [Getty]

Paying for protection, robbed anyway

For business owners, the crisis is twofold — they are losing customers who can no longer afford goods while facing theft from those who no longer care about paying.

Mubarak Abkar, a food vendor in El Kalakla Laffa market in South Khartoum, relies on RSF-affiliated traders smuggling goods from South Sudan and Chad, as well as suppliers in SAF-controlled areas.

To protect his business, Mubarak pays 2,000 SDG daily to the RSF. Yet, he has been robbed five times since the war began.

“My trade was somewhat stable before the army advanced on Khartoum, but after the RSF withdrew, looting escalated,” he said.

In mid-March, after the army forced RSF militants to retreat from parts of the capital, Mubarak’s shop was looted in the worst attack yet, costing him 1.5 million SDG (\$600) in goods.

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Sudan Ibrahim al-Natheer

Authorities claim action, but crime persists

For many Sudanese, reporting crimes to the police has become futile. Namareq never reported her attack.

“The police don’t do anything,” she said. “I don’t trust them anymore.”

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Mubarak and other traders also refrain from filing reports. While police stations remain open, they serve little purpose. Response committees in Karari say officers only document crimes but do not intervene.

However, Sudanese police insist they are taking action.

Brigadier General Fath al-Rahman al-Toum, a police spokesperson, told *TNA* that joint security patrols have been deployed and over 90,000 crime reports filed nationwide throughout the conflict.

“Patrols are securing neighbourhoods, police stations are operating, and we are coordinating with the Public Prosecution to investigate crimes, identify suspects, arrest them, and bring them to justice,” al-Toum said.

He added that police, intelligence services, and the SAF have launched a coordinated effort to restore order, including a new electronic reporting platform to help citizens document stolen property.

But for residents, these efforts mean little as crime continues unchecked. The Ministry of Interior had repeatedly posted about dismantling (https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=946836217553239&id=100066806073173&rdid=TcEKfGLbPCsAxXVz#) the stolen items market, which kept reemerging (https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=964384545798406&id=100066806073173&rdid=ZFzEdklQBn6Mromr#).

This prompted some to call for community-led solutions.

“Until the authorities restore order — whether in security or the economy — communities and civil society groups need to step up,” said lawyer and human rights advocate Abdul Basit Al-Hajj (https://www.facebook.com/abdalbasitm?rdid=NoFyjVoIXCBNEU3b&share_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fshare%2F1E2TGVDPzR%2F#). “We need local initiatives to protect neighbourhoods, coordinate with authorities, and provide urgent economic support to those in need.”

For now, Sudanese civilians are left to fend for themselves.

Namareq, like most women, has adjusted to the grim reality.

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“I no longer go to the market alone. I always go with at least four other women, hoping that makes us less of a target,” she said. “But even in groups, there are no guarantees.”

Eisa Dafalla is a Sudanese journalist focusing on Darfur's coverage

This piece was published in collaboration with Egab (<https://egab.co/>)



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