

Hamas airs cartoon showing Gilad Shalit in a coffin

By Jack Khoury / Haaretz.com

The military wing of Hamas yesterday released an animated short film in which Noam Shalit, the father of abducted Israel Defense Forces soldier Gilad Shalit, wakes up after dreaming that the Red Cross has returned the body of his son in a coffin, after years of negotiations.

The Prime Minister's Office described the video as "crude" and as serving Hamas in avoiding having to make a decision over a prisoner swap deal.

"It is yet another despicable action aimed to help the Hamas leadership avoid making a decision regarding our offer for a prisoner swap deal which it has not responded to for many months," Netanyahu added. "This offer," Netanyahu said, "which was formulated between Israel and the Hamas with the German mediator, will enable a healthy and whole Gilad Shalit to return home to his family." The three-minute animation, shown on the website of Hamas' military wing, warns that Shalit could face the same fate as Israel Air Force navigator Ron Arad, whose whereabouts have been unknown since he bailed out of his plane over Lebanon in 1986.

In the cartoon, the Noam Shalit is seen walking aimlessly, before picking up a newspaper with a front-page advertisement offering a reward of \$50 million for information on his son.

The advertisement is a direct reference to Israel's offer of a \$10 million reward for information about Arad.

Noam Shalit described the video as focusing on psychological warfare rather than on a prisoner exchange. He is depicted in the cartoon walking the streets for years, carrying Gilad's photograph and passing posters showing former prime minister Ehud Olmert and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promising to do everything to secure his son's return.

The voice-over in the clip is that of Gilad, as heard in a video released by his captors in September.

"The cynical use by the Hamas leadership of the feelings of the Shalit family, only two days after Israel allowed a girl to be flown out of the Gaza Strip so that her life can be saved, shows more than anything else the character of this terrorist organization," was the outraged response from the Prime Minister's Office.

Hamas said it wanted to reach "the wide Israeli public" and end the months-long stalemate in German and Egyptian-mediated talks on a prisoner swap.

If the Israelis want Shalit to get released safe and sound, their government should pay the price by releasing Palestinian prisoners," Hamas declared.

In his response Noam Shalit referred to his recent letter to Hamas leader Khaled Meshal, and said: ... Hamas leaders express their political and personal interests over the interests of the Palestinian people by postponing the release of over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners, and the release of the entire population in the Gaza Strip from the continuous

political and economic suffocation ... as a direct result of holding our son Gilad captive for over four years."

Senior Gaza Hamas figure Ismail Radwan said that Shalit will not be released so long as Palestinian prisoners named by the group are not freed by Israel.