

07/09/2024

PALESTINIAN AFP PHOTOGRAPHER MAHMUD HAMS WINS VISA D'OR NEWS AWARD

Palestinian AFP photojournalist Mahmud Hams was awarded the Visa d'Or News prize on Saturday for his coverage of the conflict in Gaza. The prize, one of the most prestigious in the field of photojournalism, is supported by the *Visa pour l'Image Association - Perpignan*.

Amidst the bombings, with death ever-present and the constant fear of being targeted, Mahmud Hams, who has worked for AFP for over two decades in the Palestinian territories, has relentlessly continued to document the war ignited by Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

"I spent my childhood in Gaza, and in 23 years of photojournalism, I have witnessed every war, every conflict there. But this war is unlike any other, without precedent from the very first day," says Hams. "My colleagues and I have had to face incredibly difficult conditions, with no red lines and no protections for anyone. There were even attacks targeting journalists' offices, which are supposed to be off-limits in times of war."

"Many journalists have been killed; others wounded. I've also lost friends and loved ones. We struggled to keep our families safe," he explains. "Yet, despite the ever-present danger, I continued to cover the conflict because it is my duty, the one I chose when I embraced the profession of journalism."

"I stayed calm, for my family, and to carry out my mission until the very last moment," says Hams, who left Gaza with his family in February. "I hope the photos we take show the world that this war, and the suffering, must end," he adds.



Rescuers pull a child out of the rubble of a building hit in an Israeli air strike in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on October 24, 2023.
© Mahmud Hams / AFP



Palestinians fleeing the north of Gaza City, walking past Israeli army tanks on November 24, 2023. © Mahmud Hams / AFP

"Mahmud and his colleagues, photographers and journalists from AFP in the Gaza Strip, have carried out extraordinary work in every respect, considering the conditions in which they lived with their families and loved ones," remarks Éric Baradat, AFP's Deputy News Director for Photo, Graphics, Data and Archives. "It is staggering and often unimaginable. Their testimony will be recorded in history."

After October 7, AFP relied on its Gaza bureau, staffed by nine journalists, to cover the war from within the besieged Palestinian territory. On November 2, the office building, which had been evacuated a few days earlier, was badly damaged by a strike, probably caused by Israeli tank fire, according to an investigation conducted by AFP and several international media outlets.

Having remained in Gaza for several months with no way to leave, all AFP staff and their families have since been evacuated. The Agency continues to report on the war through other Palestinian journalists, working closely with its Jerusalem office, which has been leading the coverage since the beginning of the conflict.



Palestinians collect food at a donation point in a refugee camp in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on December 23, 2023. © Mahmud Hams / AFP



AFP's Gaza-based Palestinian photographer Mahmud Hams. © AFP

Photojournalist Mahmud Hams, aged 44, holds a degree in Journalism and Information from the Islamic University of Gaza. He joined AFP in 2003 and has since covered daily news in the Gaza Strip. He has also reported from Libya and Egypt. Mahmud Hams left Rafah in February 2024 with his family and has since been working for AFP in Qatar.

Previous Awards:

- First Prize in the “News Story” category for his coverage of Gaza at the 10th edition of the Istanbul Photo Awards (organised by Anadolu Agency) in April 2024;
- First Prize in Photography at the 25th Bayeux Calvados-Normandy War Correspondents Award for his photograph of Palestinian protester Saber al-Ashkar, aged 29, throwing stones during clashes with Israeli forces (“Great March of Return”) along the Gaza Strip’s border east of Gaza City on 11th May 2018.

This photo also received the Varenne International Photo Award in December 2018.

This is the fifth Visa d’Or News award granted to an AFP photojournalist. Previous recipients include:

- Visa d’or News 2003, Georges Gobet for his reportage on the civil war in the Ivory Coast
- Visa d’or News 2015, Bülent Kiliç for his work on Syrian refugees at the Turkish border
- Visa d’or News 2016, Aris Messinis for his work on the arrival of migrants in Lesbos (Scenes of war in a zone of peace)
- Visa d’or News 2019, Guillermo Arias for his photographs of the “caravan,” the massive exodus of men and women crossing Mexico to escape poverty and violence and reach the United States at the end of 2018.

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