

■ NATION

'I survived the flood, but they didn't'

By Hani Bahasan

JEDDAH – Residents of this flood-hit city all have their own stories to tell – of loss, despair and courage in the face of adversity. Here people of Guwaizah talk about their fight to survive as the deadly floods swept through the Guwaizah District last week.

Awada Al-Sulami, a staff sergeant in the Jeddah Traffic Department, is one of those people.

"I still can't believe that I managed to rescue my whole family. When it started raining I was in Makkah on duty. I received a phone call from my family telling me that our house was being flooded by the rising water. I immediately asked permission to leave work and drove fast to my house in Guwaizah. I was shocked to find the ground floor of my house had been completely covered by the water. It was impossible to remove any of the furniture from the house. I managed to climb to the upper floor with my two wives and 12 children." Al-Sulami said he broke his arm during the rescue.

Muhammad Husein Al-Shamrani, a retiree, had a similar story.

"Like other residents of Guwaizah, I was surprised by the heavy rainfall. During the disaster, I was with my family of nine in my house, but luckily my house is on high ground. We were safe from the floods, but because of the dangerous situation, I moved with my family to Makkah until I found them a residence in a safe place, away from the danger zone. Thanks to Allah, I have now succeeded in finding a suitable residence in downtown Jeddah – a furnished apartment – and the government is paying the full rent."

Saud Al-Zahrani, a government employee who has a house in Guwaizah, said he was also worried about his wife and children on that day. "The first to be hit was the Civil Defense Station. The heavy rains and powerful floods covered the whole Civil Defense Station including its fire engines, other vehicles, and machinery. They were totally paralyzed and could not move the machinery to help in the rescue work. The location sustained severe damage as it was located in Al-Musa'ed, a planned district, which I call the 'the disastrously planned district'."

"Among the tragic scenes that I saw was of a taxi cab being carried away by the flood. Inside the taxi cab the driver was shouting for help, but there was nobody to rescue him. He then raised his finger and repeated the Shahada [I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger] loudly until he drowned."

Abdul Kareem Al-Harhi, a 15-year-old third year intermediate school student of Omair Bin Al-Hamam School, is also a survivor.

He said he was fast asleep when the floods started. He was woken up by his terrified brother who told him that the house looked like it was going to collapse.

"I couldn't take any of my personal stuff or my school textbooks and notebooks because I had no time to do so," he said.

"The rain didn't give us enough time. Our whole house collapsed totally after my family of nine left it. Were it not for Allah's mercy, the results would have been tragic." He said he will never forget the sight of seeing his friend, Sayil Al-Otaibi, and his entire family, lose their lives.

"Nothing is left of their house but a single wall. I am now afraid and sad all the time. I can't sleep at night because of the horrifying scenes I saw. Now we are staying in a furnished apartment in downtown Jeddah. I don't know when we will have a home of our own and return to it. I miss my