Israel Attacks Hospitals in Gaza's North and South

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Israel continues to pound Gaza by air, land and sea, killing scores of people from individual families in what has become a horrific daily occurrence in the long-suffering territory.

> 109 (!) members of the Dughmosh family, killed in Israeli airstrikes on the homes they were sheltering last night. https://t.co/dLzMyNxdKr
>
> — Mohammad Alsaafin (@malsaafin) December 17, 2023

Areas in southern Gaza are being hit after hundreds of thousands fled from the north to those areas, with human rights groups affirming that "there is no safe place" in the entirety of the territory.

In recent days, Israeli forces have attacked a Catholic church complex in Gaza City, executed three captives who were seeking safety, and stormed hospitals in both the north and south of the territory.

Israeli forces shot and killed two women – a mother and daughter – inside the Holy Family Parish complex in Gaza City, "where the majority of Christian families [have] taken refuge since the start of the war," the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem said on Saturday.

The women, identified as Nahida and Samar Anton, "were shot in cold blood inside the premises of the parish, where there are no belligerents," the patriarchate added.

An Israeli tank crew also fired at a convent in the church compound, the patriarchate said, destroying its generator and fuel resources and causing an "explosion and massive fire."

The attack displaced 54 people with disabilities who are now "without access to the respirators that some of them need to survive."

During his weekly blessing, Pope Francis condemned the attack as "terrorism":

Also on Saturday, Israeli forces hit the YMCA building in Gaza City's al-Rimal neighborhood, "reportedly killing six Palestinians and injuring many others," the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said.

Around 250 internally displaced people were sheltering at the facility at the time.

The most intense airstrikes on Saturday were reported in Khan Younis, in the southern half of the territory, as well as in the Shujaiya, al-Tuffah and al-Daraj areas of Gaza City, according to OCHA.

The UN office added that "intense ground operations and fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups continued on 16 December, especially in Khan Younis and Rafah, in southern Gaza," while Palestinian fighters continued to fire rockets towards Israel.

Gaza was subjected to its fifth and longest blackout of telecommunications and internet services yet, beginning on Thursday. Communication services were partially restored on Sunday.

18,800 Killed, 8,000 Missing

The Palestinian health ministry in Gaza said on Thursday – the last day that casualty figures were updated — that nearly 18,800 Palestinians had been killed in the territory since 7 October, around 70 percent of them women and children. More than 50,000 people have been reported injured.

The Palestinian Civil Defense said last week that 8,000 people were missing under the rubble of destroyed buildings.

Around 120 Israeli soldiers have been killed during the ground invasion of Gaza.

On Friday, the Israeli military killed three captives held in Gaza since 7 October. The three young men, who had either escaped from or had been released or abandoned by their captors, were shirtless and waving white flags before they were executed by troops in Shujaiya, east of Gaza City.

They had also hung up an SOS message on a white sheet reading "Save 3 abductees" in Hebrew at the building where they were killed:

"הצילו 3 חטופים" – זה השלט שתלו שלושת החטופים האמיצים, אותו כתבו באמצעות שאריות אוכל, כמה ימים לפני הירצחם בידי צה"ל.
בצבא ראו את השלטים בימים שלפני הרצח, אבל פשוט התעלמו מהם! לדבריהם בטענה כי חששו שהבניין ממולכד. זה לא מנע מהם להיכנס לבניין לאחר הרצח כדי לבדוק אם החטופים

At least one other captive was killed during a failed rescue attempt and others reported dead by the military may have lost their lives in similar circumstances.

The fate of the captives killed by Israeli troops on Friday highlighted the military's lax open fire regulations in Gaza.

Sarah Leah Whitson, the director of the Washington-based human rights watchdog DAWN, said that it was hardly the first time that the military has gunned down civilians in Gaza waving white flags.

> "Literally every single Israeli policy we have criticized for [the] past 20 years as a violation of international humanitarian law is many magnitudes worse today," she added. "This is what impunity begets."

Israel Under Pressure to Negotiate

Some family members of the captives and those who were released during a temporary truce have called on Israeli **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's** war cabinet to secure their release by returning to negotiations for a prisoner swap with Hamas.

Israel insists that only military pressure will free the captives while the Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, says that the captives will only be released on their terms.

The head of the Mossad, Israel's domestic spy agency, met with Qatar's prime minister over the weekend to renew prisoner swap negotiations. The Gulf monarchy along with Egypt mediated a deal that saw the handover of dozens of captives in November in exchange for the release of Palestinian women and children held by Israel.

Egyptian security sources told Reuters on Sunday that "Israel and Hamas are both open to a renewed ceasefire and hostage release, although disagreements remain on how it would be implemented."

Hamas insists on drawing up the list of captives to be released unilaterally "and demanding that Israeli forces withdraw behind pre-determined lines," Reuters reported.

Israel is demanding a timeline and to see Hamas' list "before setting the time and duration of the ceasefire," according to the agency. "Israel refuses to withdraw, the sources added."

Both the Qassam Brigades in a psychological warfare video published on Telegram and the family members of captives and those who were released say that time is running out for the some 130 captives who remain in Gaza.

The execution of three captives by the Israeli military will only increase domestic and international pressure to resume negotiations to secure their release, with Hamas requiring a ceasefire as a precondition.

UN Security Council Considers New Resolution

While Israel's campaign is increasingly losing international support, the Biden administration has bought Netanyahu and his war cabinet time by [vetoing a UN Security Council resolution](#) on 8 December calling for an immediate ceasefire.

The Security Council is expected to vote as soon as Monday on a resolution demanding that Israel and Hamas allow the delivery of aid to Gaza by air, land and sea, as well as an "urgent and sustainable cessation of hostilities."

> NEW: [@UAEMissionToUN](#) circulates final version of [#UNSC](#) draft resolution aimed at scaling up [#Gaza](#) humanitarian aid. Draft reso demands that parties allow/facilitate use of all land, sea and air routes to and throughout the entire Strip, including border crossings and the… [pic.twitter.com/IWKpKbuzJw](#)
>
> — Rami Ayari (@Raminho) [December 16, 2023](#)

Citing diplomats, Reuters [reported](#) on Sunday that the fate of the proposal "hinges on final negotiations between Israel ally and council veto power, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates, which has drafted the text."

The US is seeking to "tone down language on a cessation of hostilities," Reuters added, with the draft text currently calling for "an urgent and sustainable cessation of hostilities to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access."

Meanwhile, Yemeni rebel group Ansar Allah has imposed an [effective naval blockade](#) in the Red Sea, with major freight firms saying that they would avoid the Suez Canal.

Ansar Allah – also known as the Houthis – have attacked and intercepted cargo ships and fired drones and missiles towards Israel in recent weeks.

The rebel group said in a statement published on Telegram that it will continue to prevent ships destined for Israeli ports from voyaging until food and medicines are brought to "our steadfast brothers in the Gaza Strip."

With [unprecedented famine](#) and [disease](#) borne from Israel's siege causing a secondary wave of mortality, the military has ramped up its attacks on hospitals in multiple areas in Gaza.

For weeks, independent human rights experts have [warned](#) of "a genocide in the making" against the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza.

In mid-November, those rights experts said that Israel's destruction of civilian infrastructure in Gaza, including tens of thousands of housing units, in addition to "hospitals, schools, mosques, bakeries, water pipes, sewage and electricity networks … threatens to make the continuation of Palestinian life in Gaza impossible."

Those experts said that "intentional starvation amounts to a war crime."

Under US pressure, Israel reopened the Kerem Shalom (Karem Abu Salem) commercial crossing in southern Gaza [on Sunday](#), which would allow for the transfer of additional humanitarian aid stockpiling in Egypt.

Aid agencies say, however, that Israeli airstrikes make it impossible to deliver aid.

Juliette Touma, a spokesperson for UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestine refugees, recently told the BBC that "you can't deliver aid under a sky full of airstrikes."

Meanwhile, crowds have stopped trucks entering Gaza via Rafah crossing on the Egyptian border and offloaded aid – an indication of the severe desperation that has set in after more than 70 days of intensive bombardment and siege.

Israeli Forces Hindering Medical Aid, Preventing Burials

The humanitarian situation is particularly dire for Palestinians "stranded in areas where the Israeli occupying forces are deployed," three prominent human rights groups said on Sunday.

The Israeli military is denying the Palestine Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross access to those areas, threreby "hindering the crucial delivery of medical aid" and preventing the evacuation of casualties.

Nearly three dozen Palestinian Civil Defense workers have been killed and over 100 injured since 7 October.

On Friday, Israeli forces targeted and killed three civil defense workers, along with Al Jazeera cameraman Samer Abu Daqqa, while attempting to evacuate a family in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, even after the military gave permission for them to enter the area.

Abu Daqqa bled out for hours as Israeli forces obstructed paramedics from reaching him and rendering assistance. Al Jazeera bureau chief Wael al-Dahdouh was injured in the drone strike that killed Abu Daqqa.

Elsewhere in Gaza, another journalist – al-Mashhad correspondent Mohammed Balousha – was shot in both of his legs shortly after Abu Daqqa was fatally injured. He had to wait hours before rescuers were able to reach and evacuate him. He is reportedly in stable condition.

Weeks earlier, Balousha documented the grim discovery of the decomposing bodies of several babies who died in their hospital beds, still attached to medical devices, 17 days after Israel forced the evacuation of al-Nasr pediatric hospital at gunpoint.

Three Palestinian human rights organizations – Al-Haq, Al Mezan and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights – say they have documented incidents in which Palestinians died from their injuries after Israeli ground forces blocked ambulances from reaching them.

"In these dire circumstances, civilians find themselves unable to access any medical treatment for their injuries," the three groups said.

Rescue teams are unable to reach those in need or "retrieve the bodies of those killed," the rights groups added.

"In certain areas, thousands of Palestinian bodies remain under the rubble and on the streets, inaccessible and unretrieved," the groups said.

"This not only leaves their families in anguish, unable to ascertain their whereabouts and

grieve properly but also presents a significant risk of the spread of serious diseases among the population."

Bodies that are recovered are being buried in the nearest available sites, according to the groups, including "gardens, marketplaces and roadway medians."

> Gravestones, tents, garbage, and no medical supplies whatsoever, this is the current scene at Al-shifa.
> What was once a hospital, is now a shelter and graveyard.
>
> Al-Shifa hospital, Gaza City, Palestine.#Gaza pic.twitter.com/ENUHXWZrE2
>
> — Bayan (@BayanPalestine) December 17, 2023

> New mass grave discovered near Fahmi al-Jarjawi School, containing the remains of dozens of victims in Gaza. So far, 122 mass graves have been documented by @EuroMedHR, revealing the tragic toll of civilian lives claimed by Israeli genocide. pic.twitter.com/Q5NkCp5wDA
>
> — Ramy Abdu| رامي عبده (@RamAbdu) December 17, 2023

Israeli Forces Attack Hospitals

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said late Sunday that Israeli artillery fire had hit the maternity ward of the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, "leading to several casualties."

The health ministry in Gaza, Al Jazeera and Palestinian outlets reported that 13-year-old Dunya Abu Muhsen, who was being treated for an amputated foot, was killed in the strike:

> تغطية صحفية: قـ،تـلها الاحـتـلال قبل أن تحقق حلمها بعلاج قدمها المبتورة..
>
> دنيا أبو محسن، ارتـقـت إثر استهداف مبنى بمجمع ناصر الطبي بقذيـفـة من آليات الاحـتـلال المتوغلة بخانيونس. pic.twitter.com/2YgAzpEr3o
>
> — شبكة قدس الإخبارية (@qudsn) December 17, 2023

Video recorded inside the hospital showing a chaotic scene in a smoke-filled room as men carry away an evidently killed person:

> #BREAKING| The Palestinian Red Crescent the Israeli shelling of the maternity ward in Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis, #Gaza "is a serious indication of targeting hospitals and medical centers that enjoy protection and immunity according to international humanitarian law. We… pic.twitter.com/Q2lU9M5eyW
>
> — Quds News Network (@QudsNen) December 17, 2023

Photos of the site of the strike show holes blown into the walls and a pillow stained with blood:

صور| تغطية صحفية: آثار الدمــار في مشفى ناصر بخانيونس عقب استهدافه من مـدفـعية الاحـتـلال. pic.twitter.com/2OsEnOWxUv

— شبكة قدس الإخبارية (@qudsn) December 17, 2023

Also on Sunday evening, the Palestinian health ministry in Gaza stated that Israeli forces had stormed Al-Awda Hospital, which has been under siege for several days.

Medical staff, as well as patients and their companions, have been shot by Israeli military snipers at the hospital, killing a nurse and a pregnant woman's sister-in-law as they arrived at the facility for medical services.

The ministry said on Sunday that medical staff had been stripped, detained and interrogated for four hours before being released. The hospital's director, Ahmad Muhanna, was detained and taken to an unknown destination.

On Thursday, the ministry said that Israel was holding 38 health workers from Gaza, including Muhammad Abu Salmiya, the director of al-Shifa hospital.

Kamal Adwan Hospital Stormed

In northern Gaza, Israeli occupation forces withdrew from the Kamal Adwan hospital in Beit Lahiya on Saturday after storming it on Tuesday and detaining its director and medical staff.

Medical staff came under fire while delivering a press conference in the hospital's courtyard on Sunday. Video shows the staff ducking for safety as shots ring out while one of them was reading out a statement about an Israeli attack the previous day:

Gunfire interrupts a press conference held by health officials and doctors in the destroyed grounds of Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza.

Reporters there say the gunfire came from an Israeli quadcopter drone. pic.twitter.com/32fGXzYsxR

— Mohammad Alsaafin (@malsaafin) December 17, 2023

On Saturday, the Israeli military reportedly used a bulldozer to raze tents belonging to displaced people sheltering in the hospital courtyard.

Al Jazeera interviewed witnesses who said "civilians were deliberately targeted" in the bulldozer attack and "buried alive."

Videos shared on social media show body parts sticking out of the rubble in front of the hospital and tire tracks from heavy machinery in the sand.

مشاهد مروعة تفوق الوصف من داخل مستشفى كمال عدوان بعد انسحاب آليات جيش الاحتلال

The Palestinian groups Al-Haq, Al Mezan and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights said that Israeli forces had "carried out extensive excavations inside the hospital courtyard" on Saturday. They exhumed "a mass grave in which the bodies of 26 people" were buried.

The rights groups called for an independent international investigation into the "serious violations" at Kamal Adwan hospital and Israel's targeting of health facilities across Gaza.

Israeli shelling destroyed the hospital's pharmacy, doctors at Kamal Adwan told Al Jazeera, and some patients died during Israel's siege due to a lack of medical supplies and a lack of clean water.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the World Health Organization, said that during the attack on Kamal Adwan, "many patients had to self-evacuate at great risk to their health and safety, with ambulances unable to reach the facility."

Of the at least eight patients who perished during the siege, "several died due to lack of adequate health care, including a 9-year-old child."

Ghebreyesus said that WHO is "extremely concerned" for the displaced people who are sheltering at the hospital but did not comment on the reported bulldozer attack in the facility's courtyard.

> "Gaza's health system was already on its knees, and the loss of another even minimally functioning hospital is a severe blow," he added.

The Israeli military published a crude propaganda video purporting to show weapons that were hidden incubators in Kamal Adwan's neonatal intensive care unit, claiming that the hospital "was used by Hamas as a command center."

The military released similarly unconvincing staged propaganda videos following its attack on al-Shifa hospital during November.

"Bloodbath" at al-Shifa Hospital

The World Health Organization said on Saturday that it delivered supplies and medicines to the now "minimally functional" al-Shifa hospital.

Al-Shifa was "once the most important and largest referral hospital in Gaza," WHO stated. Today, only a "handful of doctors and a few nurses" are present, along with 70 volunteers, working in dire conditions.

"The hospital is only able to provide basic trauma stabilization, has no blood for transfusion, and hardly any staff to care for the constant flow of patients," WHO said.

The health workers at the site say that the emergency department is a "bloodbath, with hundreds of patients inside and new patients arriving every minute."

WHO said that a "multi-pronged humanitarian response is needed" to provide "tens of thousands of displaced people" sheltering at the hospital grounds with "food, water and shelter."

Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza City is the sole hospital out of 24 in northern Gaza that remains partially functional after more than two months of Israeli strikes and siege. Three other hospitals remain only minimally functional, according to WHO.

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Featured image: Dr Suleiman Qaoud surveys the damage at the Rantisi Specialist Hospital, part of the Nasser Medical Complex in Gaza City, following Israeli missile attacks on November 6, 2023 [Abdelhakim Abu Riash/Al Jazeera]

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