

## Israel Keeps Gaza Siege, with Armed Attacks

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Israel kept its iron blockade on Gaza Strip for the 19th consecutive day, despite the precarious humanitarian situation here, while skirmishes continued between Hebrew military and Islamic Hamas militants.

Tension prevailed at dawn Sunday at this border coastal enclave controlled by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and Jewish territory, whose troops prevented the traffic of persons and goods through the legal crossing points.

Palestinian media indicated that a land-land Israeli missile impacted Saturday in the northern town of Beit Hanoum, after which Hamas militia forces responded by shooting three rockets against the cities of Ashkelon and Sderot, in both cases without victims.

The Israeli army -whose attacks on Gaza left 15 dead in 16 days- admitted its troops fired against a group of Palestinians who allegedly had fired a missile moments before and were ready to fire others.

The Hamas leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, affirmed that Palestinian armed groups wish to maintain the truce agreed last June with Israel, but only if it assumes a reciprocal attitude, which now seems very unlikely.

After the confrontations, Jewish minister of Defense, Ehud Barak, ordered to maintain the measure adopted last November 4 to close all the crossing points to the Strip and prevent the access of trucks loaded with different supplies.

Despite the calls of the UN, the International Red Cross Comité and other humanitarian organizations, Tel Aviv denies the entry of trucks with medicines, medical supplies, food, fuel and others.

The UN warned that after the waiver given two weeks ago to 30-odd trucks for the delivery of aid, the situation is deteriorating due to the lack of fuel which forces to long power cuts in hospitals and bakeries.

About 750 thousand Palestinian refugees in Gaza are on the verge of crisis, while in one way or another the Israeli siege affects 1.5 million residents of the Strip because food reserves

are running out, said sources of the CICR to Prensa Latina.

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