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Palestine

# One-fourth of Gaza's population displaced by Israel's violence

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### **The sounds of Israeli airstrikes, tank shells and drones are the only ones one can hear in Gaza. The noise is overwhelming.**

On Sunday, 55 Palestinians were killed in multiple airstrikes across Gaza, according to Bethlehem-based Ma'an News Agency.

Ten members of the al-Ghoul family in the Tel al-Sultan neighborhood of Rafah in southern Gaza were slain when their home was hit by Israeli fire on Sunday. One of two identical twin baby boys born during the assault was immediately killed by the strike and the other was reported to be fighting for his life.

From dawn to evening on Saturday, more than seventy Palestinians, the majority of them from Rafah, were killed and scores were injured.

The weekend's killings brought the death toll of Israel's assault to at least 1,810 Palestinians and the number of injured to nearly 10,000 since 7 July, according to the Gaza health ministry spokesperson.

Eighty-five percent of Palestinians killed in Gaza were civilians, according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights.

Sixty-four Israeli soldiers have been killed as well as two civilians and one foreign national, according to the United Nations.

## **Health disaster**

Israel's unabated attacks on the Gaza Strip have inflicted the widespread destruction of thousands of structures including hospitals, mosques, universities, governmental and nongovernmental facilities and factories.

On Saturday, the UN warned of a "rapidly unfolding" health disaster in Gaza as Palestinians face "deteriorating" access to hospitals and clinics and as basic medicines and medical supplies run critically low.

The UN reported that one-third of all hospitals across Gaza as well as 14 primary healthcare clinics and 29 ambulances have been damaged or destroyed, "and at least half of all public health primary care clinics are closed."

Israeli shells hit Rafah's Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital on Saturday. Reports from Rafah indicate that hospital crews fled the scene due to the continued Israeli strikes and that all recovered casualties were redirected to smaller facilities in town.

Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesperson for the Gaza health ministry, called on international organizations to help paramedic crews return to the evacuated al-Najjar hospital.

## “War crimes”

Three leading rights groups in Gaza — the Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights and the Al Dameer Association for Human Rights — held a joint press conference on Saturday at Gaza City's al-Shifa hospital.

The groups called for accelerating procedures to bring Israel to justice for what the three groups termed “horrible war crimes.” They also condemned the UN Secretary-General's denunciation of the armed resistance in Gaza.

“The Secretary-General condemns in the strongest terms the reported violation by Hamas of the mutually agreed humanitarian ceasefire which commenced this morning,” a statement attributed to Ban Ki-moon was issued on Friday.

The Secretary-General's statement came after the Israeli military claimed that Hamas had captured an Israeli soldier near Rafah on Friday morning as a 72-hour ceasefire was set to begin.

“United Nations' Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's condemnation of the given Palestinian right to resist an occupying power is unacceptable,” Raji Sourani, director of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, said at the press briefing.

“Ki-moon equals between an occupier and the occupied, the oppressed and the oppressor, and therefore he plays down the Palestinian people's right to defend themselves,” he added.

The alleged capture of the soldier was condemned by US President Barack Obama and used as a pretext for Israel to kill at least 110 Palestinians in Rafah since Friday morning. On Saturday evening, Israel acknowledged that the soldier had been “killed in combat.”

## Mass displacement

Meanwhile, Palestinians in Gaza continue to be displaced.

“I have been told by the International Committee of the Red Cross that my house will be shelled by Israel,” Muhammad al-Rifai, a 62-year-old resident of the Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza, told The Electronic Intifada on Friday.

Al-Rifai is father to six daughters and a son, and a grandfather of several children. Many of them live in the same cinderblock home. A few days ago, al-Rifai received a phone call from the Israeli army warning him to leave his house ahead of an imminent airstrike.

Thousands of homes have been destroyed or damaged by Israeli airstrikes and shelling. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs states that “up to 25 percent of Gaza's population may now be forcibly displaced, of whom 270,000 are hosted in UNRWA shelters alone.”

In many of those strikes, families were inside their homes and were killed or injured. In the Maghazi refugee camp alone, three houses were shelled with people inside. The latest attack came on Saturday morning, when Israel

shelled a house belonging to the Qandil family, killing three.

As of 30 July, at least 76 families had lost three or more members in a single Israeli strike, according to UN figures.

## University targeted

Israel's airstrikes and destruction on Saturday included an attack on the Islamic University of Gaza. Israel claimed the school is affiliated with the Hamas party and that it targeted a "weapon development" center inside the university.

At the time of publication, Ma'an News Agency had reported that Israel announced a seven-hour unilateral humanitarian ceasefire to take effect at 10am Monday morning.

A Palestinian delegation in Cairo, including Hamas representatives, came to a joint position on Sunday calling for "a ceasefire; Israeli troop withdrawal from Gaza; the end of the siege of Gaza and opening its border crossings."

Hamas insists that any ceasefire deal should include lifting the Israeli blockade of Gaza, now in its seventh year, and the release of Palestinian prisoners.

## Nowhere safe

Witnesses in southern and northern Gaza told The Electronic Intifada that hundreds of families from those areas began returning back to their homes on Saturday after Israel announced that it was withdrawing ground troops in some areas.

Seven members of one family were killed in an airstrike on their home in Jabaliya in northern Gaza on Sunday one day after the army said it was safe for residents to return, Ma'an News Agency reported.

"Israeli officials said Saturday that it was safe for residents of the northern Gaza Strip, with the exception of Beit Lahiya, to return to their homes," the agency added.

The reality on the ground is that nowhere is safe for Palestinians in Gaza as Israel's relentless bombing enters its fifth week.

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