Israel fires at Gaza, killing two Palestinian teenagers

Gaza City, Feb 19 (RHC)-- Israeli military troops have fired at 18 targets in the Gaza Strip, killing at least two Palestinian teenagers in retaliation for a bomb attack that wounded four Israeli soldiers.

The two 17-year-old Palestinian victims were killed Monday morning in Rafah by tank fire as Israeli troops claimed they were trying to cross the border into Israel, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Two other Palestinians were wounded and are currently being treated in Rafah, one of whom is in critical condition.

Authorities claim the air strikes and tank fire were directed at weapon-making facilities, training camps and observation posts from Hamas, the most prominent political party and militant group in Gaza, and Islamic Jihad, even though no group has claimed responsibility for the original attack.

Instead, Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman declared the Popular Resistance Committees, PRC, as responsible for the bomb attack. The PRC is a smaller militant group and has usually been at odds with Hamas, the dominant political faction.

Lieberman held Hamas responsible for what happened in Gaza anyway, even if they were not directly responsible. "We will hunt down those responsible for yesterday's incident," he told Israel Radio on

Sunday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said they would "respond appropriately" to the attack.

The army carried out six large-scale attacks on Hamas positions in Beit Hanoun, Rafa, Deir el-Balah and Khan Younis, allegedly including a tunnel that leads into Israel. Several homes were damaged by a F-16 aircraft attack, according to Palestinian news agency WAFA.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum blamed Israel for the violence. "Hamas holds the Israeli occupation fully responsible for the consequences of its continued escalation against our people," said Barhoum.

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