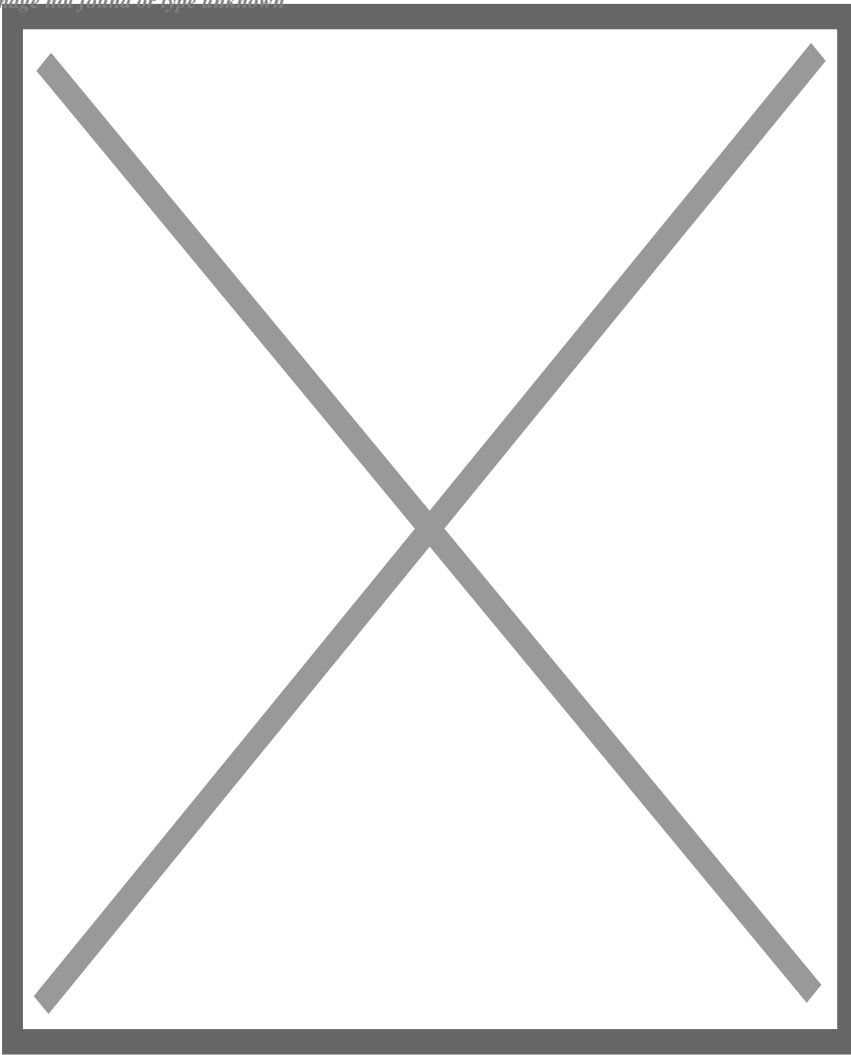


Israel bombs Greek Orthodox Gaza church sheltering displaced people

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A woman cries at the Greek Orthodox Church after an Israeli attack in Gaza City, Gaza on Friday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Anadolu/Getty Images

Gaza City, October 20 (RHC)-- An Israeli air attack has killed and injured a “large number” of displaced people sheltering at a church compound in Gaza, according to the besieged Palestinian enclave’s interior ministry.

The strike left a “large number of martyrs and injured” at the compound of the Greek Orthodox Saint Porphyrius Church in Gaza City. Gaza’s Hamas-run government media office reported on Friday that 18 Christian Palestinians were among the dead. Witnesses told the AFP news agency the air raid appeared to have been aimed at a target close to the 12th-century place of worship where many Christian and Muslim Gaza residents had taken refuge as the war raged in the enclave.

The Israeli military told AFP that its fighter jets had hit a command and control centre involved in launching rockets and mortars towards Israel. “As a result of the IDF [Israeli army] strike, a wall of a church in the area was damaged,” it said, adding “we are aware of reports on casualties. The incident is under review.”

Witnesses said the attack damaged the facade of the church and caused an adjacent building to collapse, adding that many injured people were evacuated to hospital.

Saint Porphyrius, built in about 1150, is (or was) the oldest church still in use in Gaza. Located in an historic neighbourhood of Gaza City, the church offered sanctuary to people of various faiths over generations.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem expressed its “strongest condemnation” of the strike.

“Targeting churches and their institutions, along with the shelters they provide to protect innocent citizens, especially children and women who have lost their homes due to Israeli airstrikes on residential areas over the past 13 days, constitutes a war crime that cannot be ignored,” the patriarchate said in a statement.

Explaining the damage done to the church, the Israeli military claimed: “Hamas intentionally embeds its assets in civilian areas and uses the residents of the Gaza Strip as human shields.”

Gaza has been hit by a relentless barrage of Israeli fire following an attack by Hamas fighters on October 7, which Israel says killed at least 1,400 people, most of them civilians.

Israel’s campaign since has killed at least 3,785 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, most of them civilians, according to the Hamas health ministry.

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