

*Israeli forces with helicopters and tanks once again attack crowds waiting for aid in Gaza, killing at least 21*

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Gaza City, March 15 (RHC)-- At least 21 Palestinians have been killed after Israeli forces opened fire on thousands of people waiting for aid in Gaza City in the same area that was targeted hours earlier, government officials said.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza described the late Thursday attack as a “new, premeditated massacre” and said more than 150 people were wounded. It was the latest in a string of assaults on people desperately in need of food and other essential supplies as Israel continues to obstruct and severely control the entry of aid into the enclave.

Earlier on Thursday, at the same food distribution point at the Kuwait Roundabout, Israeli forces had shot dead at least six Palestinians, as the death toll has risen to more than 400 people in such attacks.

Witnesses told Al Jazeera that Israeli forces had used helicopters, tanks and drones to target thousands of people waiting on food trucks.

The Israeli military denied that its forces had opened fire on the crowds and claimed instead that “armed Palestinians” were responsible for the attack.

Shaina Low, communications adviser for the Norwegian Refugee Council, said the ongoing killings of aid seekers represent a breakdown in communication between aid groups and Israeli authorities. “It’s a clear sign that the deconfliction system, in which humanitarian agencies and the UN notify and correspond with Israel ... is completely failing,” she told Al Jazeera, adding that this system is meant to allow aid agencies to inform Israel of routes they will take to ensure they aren’t targeted. “This is something that is preventable and shouldn’t be happening,” Low added.

Rights groups say that Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war against Palestinians.

With Israel’s war on Gaza now in its sixth month, the United Nations has warned that at least 576,000 people in the enclave – a quarter of the population – are on the brink of famine, and global pressure has been growing on Israel to allow more access to aid.

Israel, which controls Gaza’s crossings, has opened just one entry point into the enclave since the start of the war and imposed “endless checking procedures” for trucks to pass through, UN agencies say.

Faced with Israel’s obstruction of aid trucks, the international community has devised complicated workarounds, including a sea corridor from Cyprus to the besieged Strip and plans by the United States to set up a temporary jetty off Gaza’s coast to bring in supplies – a move criticised as an attempt to divert attention from Washington’s continued military and political support for Israel as famine looms and the onslaught persists.

Last month, Israeli forces killed 118 people scrambling for flour on the coastal al-Rashid Street, southwest of Gaza City, provoking worldwide condemnation, but the attacks have nonetheless continued unabated.

The Gaza Health Ministry said in its latest update on Thursday that at least 31,341 Palestinians have been killed and 73,134 wounded by Israeli attacks since October 7.

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