

Israel expands war on Gaza Strip to seize extensive territory



Gaza City, April 2 (RHC)-- Israel has expanded its ground aggression in the besieged Gaza Strip, seeking to seize a large portion of the war-ravaged Palestinian territory. Israel intensified its onslaught Wednesday, with its minister of military affairs Israel Katz announcing plans to “capture extensive territory” to establish what he claimed to be new security zones.

The expansion, he said, aims to dismantle Hamas infrastructure and increase pressure for the release of Israeli captives held by the Gaza-based group.

The Israeli military has already set up a "buffer zone" within Gaza, expanding an area that existed around its edges before the war, and adding a large area in the so-called Netzarim Corridor through the middle of the territory.

On Monday, the Israeli military ordered all residents of Rafah in southern Gaza to leave and on Tuesday, it expanded the forced displacement notices to Beit Hanoon, Beit Lahiya and nearby areas in the north of the territory.

According to The Times of Israel, the military has deployed its 36th Division to Gaza for the expanded onslaught, with troops entering the strip early Wednesday morning.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu wants Hamas to release the 59 Israeli captives remaining in Gaza in exchange for Palestinians held in Israeli jails, but without committing to ending the war and withdrawing troops from the besieged territory.

The families of Israeli captives issued a statement Wednesday, slamming Israel's announcement of the expanding military aggression, The Times of Israel reported.

The families "were horrified to wake up this morning" to the announcement that the onslaught in Gaza would be expanded for 'capturing extensive territory,' the statement said. "Has it been decided to sacrifice the captives for the sake of 'territorial gains?'" the families asked in a joint statement.

They said instead of securing the release of the captives through a deal and ending the war, the Israeli regime "is sending more soldiers into Gaza to fight in the same areas where battles have already taken place repeatedly."

The onslaught, which includes extensive evacuations particularly in Rafah and Khan Yunis, has led to significant civilian displacement.

Since dawn on Wednesday, Israeli attacks in central and southern Gaza have killed at least 21 Palestinians, medical sources said. In Khan Yunis, 12 people lost their lives when Israeli forces targeted a house in Khan Yunis, while two others were killed in a drone strike in areas north of Rafah, bringing the total fatalities to 10.

An Israeli airstrike near an UNRWA medical center in the Jabalia refugee camp killed eight people, including three children.

The UK-based Hostages Families Forum NGO said the expansion of aggression in Gaza will diminish the chances of securing the captives' release through diplomatic means. It said what Tel Aviv currently does in Gaza indicates that securing the captives' release is no longer a priority for the cabinet of prime minister Netanyahu.

Hamas recently accepted an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire proposal, agreeing to release five living Israeli captives, including a US-Israeli citizen, along with the bodies of several deceased captives, in exchange for a 50-day pause in hostilities.

However, Israel rejected the offer and presented its own counterproposal. Shortly afterwards, Netanyahu declared that Israel was entering the "final stage" of the war.



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