

At least 21 people killed in stampede, triggered by Israeli guards firing tear gas into a crowd of hungry Palestinians



People carry the body of a victim as they mourn Palestinians who were killed while seeking aid

Gaza City, July 17 (RHC)-- At least 21 Palestinians have been killed in the latest carnage at the GHF aid distribution center in southern Gaza, with most of the victims reported to have died in a stampede.

Gaza's Ministry of Health has disputed the allegation from the controversial U.S.- and Israel-backed organisation that armed agitators were responsible for the incident on Wednesday morning at the site in Khan Younis.

Without providing any evidence, it said the stampede had been provoked by "elements within the crowd – armed and affiliated with Hamas." The statement also claimed that GHF staff saw multiple weapons in the crowd and that one of its U.S. contractors was threatened with a gun.

However, Palestinian authorities and witnesses have vehemently contested the GHF's version of events.

Gaza's Health Ministry released a statement saying 21 Palestinians had been killed at the GHF site on Wednesday. It noted that 15 of the victims died as a result of a stampede and suffocation after tear gas was fired at crowds of aid seekers. "For the first time, deaths have been recorded due to suffocation and the intense stampede of citizens at aid distribution centres," the ministry added.

Speaking from Gaza City on Wednesday, Al Jazeera's correspondent Hani Mahmoud said a witness had confirmed that tear gas was fired on the crowd, "causing mayhem and chaos", which led to a stampede.

Meanwhile, a medical source at Nasser Hospital told the AFP news agency that the desperate and starving victims had been trying to receive food, but the main gate to the distribution centre had been closed. "The Israeli occupation forces and the centre's private security personnel opened fire on them, resulting in a large number of deaths and injuries," they said.

Since the GHF started operating in the enclave in late May, at least 875 people have been killed trying to get food, according to the United Nations, which said on Tuesday that 674 of these deaths had occurred "in the vicinity of GHF sites".

Speaking last week, UN rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said most of the casualties had suffered "gunshot injuries." Both the Israeli army and GHF contractors from the United States have been accused of carrying out the killings.

The UN has described the GHF sites as "death traps" -- calling them "inherently unsafe" and a breach of humanitarian impartiality standards.

Amjad Shawa, director of the Palestinian NGOs Network, said on Wednesday that the GHF was guilty of gross mismanagement. "People who flock in their thousands (to GHF sites) are hungry and exhausted, and they get squeezed into narrow places, amid shortages of aid and the absence of organization and discipline by the GHF," he said.

The latest deaths near aid distribution centers came as an Israeli attack on a camp of displaced people in al-Mawasi killed nine people. In total, at least 43 Palestinians, including 21 people who were seeking aid, have been killed since dawn on Wednesday, according to medical sources.

[SOURCE: PRESS TV and NEWS AGENCIES]



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