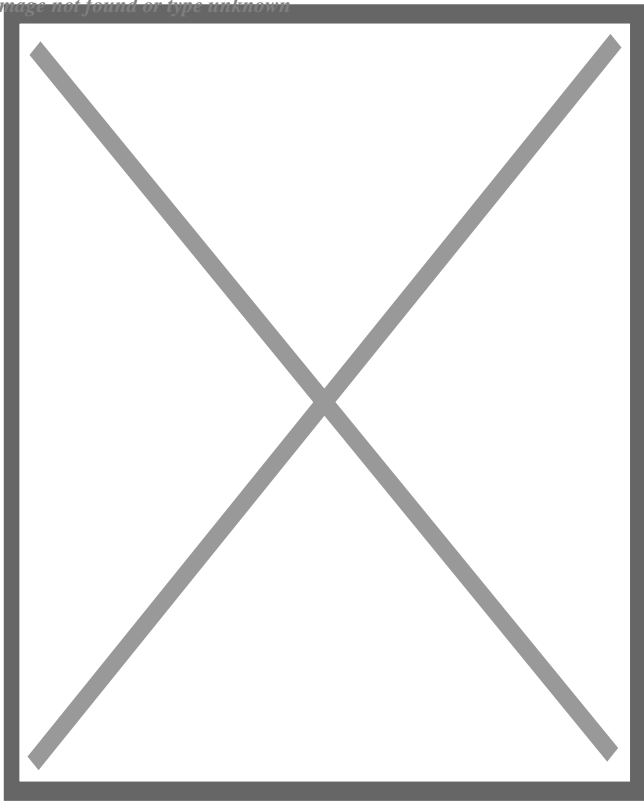


Palestinian death toll in Gaza reaches horrifying milestone: Over 50,000

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Gaza City, March 23 (RHC)-- The number of Palestinians killed since Israel launched its war on Gaza in October 2023 has crossed 50,000, according to health officials.

Gaza's Ministry of Health said on Sunday that at least 50,021 Palestinians have been killed and 113,274 wounded since Israel began attacking the besieged territory following an attack led by the Palestinian group Hamas on October 7, 2023.

The ministry said at least 41 people were killed over the past 24-hour reporting period as Israel ramps up its attacks on Gaza after its refusal to enter the second phase of a ceasefire deal it had signed with Hamas in January.

Entering the second phase would have required Israel to withdraw its forces from Gaza -- a condition it agreed to in the deal mediated by Egypt, Qatar and the United States. Even during phase one, which took effect on January 19 and saw the release of captives in exchange for Palestinians held in Israeli jails, Israel killed more than 150 Palestinians in Gaza.

Reporting from Gaza City in northern Gaza, Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud said the announced death toll is a "very grim, horrifying milestone." "For the record, the 50,000 figure is only a conservative estimate.

These are only the people who have been registered at health facilities across the Gaza Strip. There are so many others buried without being registered or who have gone missing, trapped under piles of rubble," Mahmoud said.

"Of the more than 50,000 killed, 17,000 are children. A whole generation has been wiped out. These children would have affected how their society would have progressed – politically, economically and intellectually," he added.

The confirmed death toll does not include more than 11,000 who are missing and are presumed dead, according to the Gaza media office, while a study published last July in the Lancet journal said the accumulative effects of Israel's war on Gaza could mean the true death toll could reach more than 186,000 people.

Israel has repeatedly claimed that its attacks carefully target members of Hamas, but the number of civilians killed tells a different story, analysts say.

"Israel has been making these types of baseless claims throughout the past 17 months, which are totally unsupported by the evidence on the ground," Omar Rahman, a fellow at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs, told Al Jazeera.

"If anything, the evidence often points to deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, which accounts for the massive death toll for children."

Meanwhile, the Israeli military on Sunday called on residents in the southern Gaza city of Rafah to forcibly evacuate as its troops began operations in the area. It said Israeli troops had surrounded Rafah's Tal as-Sultan neighbourhood.

Israel has been accused of repeatedly targeting so-called "safe zones" where it forced people to take shelter. The Israeli military also announced that it was conducting operations in Beit Hanoon in northern Gaza.

Last week, Israel resumed its attacks, shattering the ceasefire after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he would pursue a military path to pressure Hamas into accepting a deal to release remaining captives, who were not exchanged in the January ceasefire agreement.

Hamas reiterates it is ready to release all the captives if Israel agrees to enter phase 2 of the earlier truce deal.

Since Tuesday, Israel has killed more than 600 people, including more than 200 children.

Earlier, Hamas announced that its official Salah al-Bardawil was killed in an Israeli attack on his tent in Khan Younis in the early hours of Sunday.

The Israeli military offensive comes as Gaza is reeling from a total blockade by Israel since early March that has caused a severe shortage of food, water, medicine and fuel in the territory. Rights group Amnesty International said cutting off electricity supply to a desalination plant in Gaza was "cruel and unlawful".

Rights groups, aid agencies and a number countries including France, Germany and the United Kingdom have called on Israel to allow humanitarian assistance to enter Gaza.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA and NEWS AGENCIES]

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