

# *Netanyahu promises very powerful response if ceasefire broken*

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**Israeli prime minister met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken following the 11-day Gaza bombardment**

Tel Aviv, May 25 (RHC)-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has promised a “very powerful response” if Hamas breaks a ceasefire that ended a deadly 11-day bombardment of the Gaza Strip. Netanyahu made the comment in West Jerusalem on Tuesday during a joint press conference with

American Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who travelled to the region to bolster the initial ceasefire agreement.

The Israeli prime minister thanked the United States for “firmly supporting Israel’s right to self-defence” during the violence, in which Israeli air strikes killed at least 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, in Gaza.

At least 12 Israelis, including two children, were killed by rockets fired by Hamas and other armed groups from Gaza during the fighting, which began on May 10 and saw inter-communal violence break out across Israel, as well as several Palestinians killed in protests in the occupied West Bank.

“We too will give meaning to our commitment to our self-defence. If Hamas breaks the calm and attacks Israel our response will be very powerful,” Netanyahu said.

Blinken, in turn, said the U.S. would work to assure international aid to rebuild Gaza would not benefit Hamas. “We’ll work with our partners closely, with all, to ensure that Hamas does not benefit from the reconstruction assistance,” Blinken said.

The secretary of state said his trip to the region was four-fold: “To demonstrate the commitment of the United States to Israel’s security; to start to work toward greater stability and reduce tensions in the West Bank and Jerusalem; to support urgent humanitarian and reconstruction assistance for Gaza to benefit the Palestinian people; and to continue to rebuild our relationship with the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority.”

He also defended against criticism that the administration of President Joe Biden should have taken a more public and firm line with Israel earlier on in the fighting, crediting Washington’s “intense, behind the scenes diplomacy” in bringing about the ceasefire, which was reached through Egyptian mediators on May 21.

The comments by Washington’s top diplomat are unlikely to satisfy human rights advocates, who have repeatedly called on the US to condemn Israel’s actions against Gaza, which destroyed residential buildings and infrastructure and which many observers argue amount to collective punishment.

The U.S. previously and repeatedly blocked United Nations Security Council joint statements calling for a ceasefire during the violence. Blinken also did not address calls from some U.S. legislators to end military aid and arms sales to Israel, with the secretary of state and Netanyahu on Tuesday hailing a U.S. commitment to replenish Israel’s Iron Dome air defence system in the wake of the fighting.

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