

# *Relentless bombardment of Gaza continues as death toll tops 5,000, nearly half of them children*

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Gaza City, October 23 (RHC)-- Nearly 5,100 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip since Israel launched a relentless bombing campaign against the besieged enclave after an attack by Hamas inside Israel more than two weeks ago, according to health officials.

About 40 percent of the 5,087 people killed are children, Gaza's Ministry of Health said on Monday, the day when Israel's army said it carried out more than 300 new air attacks within 24 hours. Palestinian officials said more than 400 people were killed in that period.

Thousands of buildings have been destroyed, and more than one million people displaced in the territory, which has been under siege and largely deprived of water, food and other basic supplies. Fighting raged unabated overnight after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised that Israel would "erase Hamas," as a full-scale ground invasion loomed.

Hamas's attack in southern Israel killed at least 1,400 people, mostly civilians, according to Israeli officials.

On Monday, the Israeli military said it had hit "over 320 military targets in the Gaza Strip" in the previous 24 hours. It said the targets "included tunnels containing Hamas terrorists, dozens of operational command centres" as well as "military compounds and observation posts" used by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, another armed group.

Gaza's government media office said more than 60 people were killed in the raids during the night, including 17 in a single strike that hit a house in northern Gaza, and at least 10 were killed in new strikes on Monday morning.

In the south, Rafah resident Mohammed Abu Sabalah said he had returned home from a mosque after dawn prayers on Monday and "a quarter of an hour later there was a bombing".

"We couldn't see anything because of the thick smoke," he said, adding, "We thank God that we've emerged safe and sound" with "only a few windows and doors destroyed".

Tala Herzallah, 21, who evacuated to the south following Israel's order to leave the northern Gaza Strip on October 13, said last night "could not be "described in words". "We were literally shaking due to fear. We didn't know if we would wake up alive or not," Tala noted, adding that she woke up in the morning to a "series of bombings" nearby.

Israel has continued bombarding Gaza's south despite telling 1.1 million people in the north of the besieged enclave to relocate there ahead of an expected ground offensive. "We were displaced from Tal al-Hawa to Rafah at the request of the Israeli army, and this is what happened to us. My son is a 3-month-old martyr," the father of a child killed in an attack in Rafah told Al Jazeera.

Israeli forces are massed near the Gaza border, and smaller units have already carried out limited incursions, targeting Hamas and hoping to rescue captives the group took from Israel on October 7. Israel now puts the number of captives at 222.

In one such operation, a 19-year-old Israeli soldier was killed and three wounded, the army said, adding that the tank operation aimed "to dismantle terror infrastructure ... and locate missing persons and bodies".

Hamas confirmed the skirmishes, saying its fighters encountered an Israeli armoured unit infiltrating east of Khan Younis in southern Gaza. The group said its fighters destroyed some Israeli military equipment.

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