

Israel blocks Palestinians' return to northern Gaza



Gaza City, November 24 (RHC)-- Israel has said that northern Gaza is out of bounds as displaced Palestinians attempt to use the pause in fighting to return to their homes.

Large numbers of displaced people were attempting to return home across Gaza as the four-day truce brokered by Qatar took effect on Friday morning. However, Israel has warned people that they will not be allowed to enter the north of the war-torn enclave.

Videos obtained by Al Jazeera showed Palestinians returning to their homes in Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip, despite the Israeli army's insistence that it is a combat zone.

At least two Palestinians are reported to have been killed by the Israeli military, and 11 wounded, as they have attempted the trip to northern Gaza.

The Israeli military has said that it expects Hamas would try to encourage or push civilians to return to the northern part of the Gaza Strip and that it was prepared to prevent it from happening, Al Jazeera's Mohammed Jamjoom reported from occupied East Jerusalem.

Israel dropped leaflets over southern Gaza, warning the hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians who sought refuge there not to return north amid its ground offensive, reported the Associated Press.

Still, hundreds could be seen walking north on Friday.

Citing witnesses, Palestinian news agency Wafa said that seven people were wounded by Israeli forces as they attempted the trip to northern Gaza.

Several have been injured and taken back to hospitals in the south of the territory, reported Al Jazeera's Tareq Abu Azzoum, from Khan Younis in southern Gaza. Two were shot and killed by Israeli troops and another 11 were wounded in the legs. An AP journalist reported seeing two bodies and the wounded as they arrived at a hospital.

An Israeli military spokesperson, Avichay Adraee, released a statement in Arabic on X. "Residents of Gaza, the movement of the population from the south of the Strip to the north will not be allowed in any way, but only from the north to the south," it read.

"We invite you not to approach the military forces and the areas north of the Gaza Valley. Take advantage of the time to replenish your needs and arrange your affairs," he said.

"The area north of the Gaza Strip is a combat zone and it is forbidden to stay there. The war is not over and we urge you to obey the teachings and warnings for your safety," Adraee added.

Many people no longer have a home to go back to after seven weeks of Israeli bombardment and ground invasions that started on October 7.

Gaza resident Ashraf Shann told Al Jazeera that he had mixed feelings about the truce. "I have nowhere to go back to even if [the Israelis] allow us to go back to Gaza City. My house was bombed and completely destroyed on the third day of the war," he said.

"At the same time, I'm happy for those people whose loved ones are missing. At least they can go and pick up the pieces and try to search for them."

Zak Hania, a displaced Palestinian who fled the Shati refugee camp, said "everything is broken in Gaza." "We don't know whether to be happy or sad. Our houses are broken, our hearts are broken, everything is broken in Gaza now. We do not know how life will continue after this," he told Al Jazeera from the southern city of Khan Younis.

Asked if he was planning to head home during the truce, Hania responded: "We can't go because the Israeli army said nobody's allowed to go back to the north and people are afraid and hesitant to go.

"I think it's dangerous to go back because they're still on the road separating the north and south of Gaza ... We're not sure about anything and we're just praying that the ceasefire holds," he said.

Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Khan Younis in southern Gaza, said the looming fact that the war will resume in a matter of days was a huge disappointment for people. “There is a sense of happiness, a sense of optimism, but it is a cautious optimism because after 48 days of relentless air strikes and killings, so many Palestinians have been surrounded by destruction and blood, and the bodies of loved ones and family members,” Mahmoud said.

“The ceasefire comes when people want to take a moment and just check on each other and check on their homes and belongings,” he said.

“There is also the looming fact that the war will resume in a matter of days, according to Israeli officials,” Mahmoud said. “That statement was very devastating and depressing for many Palestinians who believe this ceasefire is incomplete and unfair, as they want to go and check on their homes and see who is left among their family members,” he said.

Israel’s war has killed more than 14,800 people in Gaza since October 7. In Israel, the official death toll from Hamas’s attacks before the war stands at about 1,200.

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