

British-Palestinian 50 days into hunger strike demands end to UK support for Israel



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London, December 13 (RHC)-- A British-Palestinian man, who has lost nearly 20 kg since starting a hunger strike 50 days ago, is demanding the UK government act to stop Israel's months-long bombardment of the Gaza Strip. Wael Arafat, originally from Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, said he planned to continue his hunger strike until the British government backed a ceasefire.

"I want the UK government to do something, and I want the Israeli government to stop killing people," he said.

Arafat, 28, stopped eating and drinking on October 22, after learning that his sister and her four children had been killed by an Israeli air strike on their home in Gaza City. Over the past week, Arafat has taken a small amount of fluids through an IV drip, after doctors told him his condition had seriously deteriorated.

Arafat is currently unable to walk but remains conscious and talking. "I know I might die. I know something could happen to my health," Arafat was quoted as saying by Middle East Eye from a hospital in Bath, southwest England, where he is being treated.

"I don't want to die. I'm doing this for my own people who are suffering. Every person in Gaza is my brother and sister," he said.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad decried Britain's decision to conduct Gaza surveillance flights as 'direct involvement' in Israel's 'genocidal war' on the Strip. Arafat lost both his parents when he was five years old and was brought up by his grandmother in Gaza, before moving to the UK as a young teenager. Arafat had only found out he had a sister in Gaza two years ago, and made contact with her through his former neighbours.

Deir al-Balah has frequently been the target of Israeli bombardment, including air strikes this month which killed scores of civilians.

"There is no safe place in Gaza," said Arafat. "People have been told to move but it's not safe to. We want to be heard. We want to say enough is enough." He said he felt a hunger strike was the only way to make his voice heard.

"It's exactly what they do in [Israeli] prisons," he said, referring to Palestinians who stop eating or drinking to protest their detention and inhumane conditions in Israeli jails. "They don't have a voice, they only have the hunger strike."

Israel's relentless bombardment of the Gaza Strip keeps taking a heavy toll on the civilian population in the besieged Palestinian territory. Israeli airstrikes have been pounding locations across Gaza, including southern parts that Israel had declared as safe zones.

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