

Report says Israeli attack kills Palestinian border crossing chief

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Bassem Ghaben, director of Israeli-controlled Karem Abu Salem crossing, was working to bring humanitarian aid into Gaza. A truck carrying humanitarian aid at the Israeli side of the Karem Abe Salem border crossing with Gaza, December 19 [Menahem Kahana/AFP]

Rafah, December 21 (RHC)-- An Israeli air raid has killed a Palestinian border crossing director in southern Gaza, according to Palestinian officials and Hamas. Bassem Ghaben, the director of the Israeli-controlled Karem Abu Salem crossing – called Kerem Shalom in Israel – was killed along with three other

people by Israeli fire, Gaza health and border authorities said on Thursday.

Ghaben had been working to facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid into the enclave through the crossing, which opened on Friday, said Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud, reporting from the southern city of Rafah some 3 km (1.86 miles) from the checkpoint.

Mahmoud said the attack showed that Israel's military is not only targeting infrastructure and homes, but also places that Palestinians rely on for "humanitarian aid they need for their survival". "This is part of an ongoing systematic campaign of destruction," the correspondent said. "It is unclear if the crossing is going to continue to work."

Israel's military indicated it was not involved in the Karem Abu Salem attack, saying it was not "familiar" with the incident. The crossing, located on the southern tip of Gaza bordering Israel, had been approved to temporarily reopen on Friday to increase the flow of aid into Gaza, where 1.9 million people are displaced and in desperate need of food, water, and medicine. Previously, aid had been limited to the Rafah border crossing with Egypt.

The border chief's killing came as Israeli raids pounded all areas of the besieged strip, hitting 230 targets in just 24 hours, according to the Israeli army.

The most intense bombardment took place in the northern part of the enclave, where there are no functional hospitals. The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Thursday that only nine out of 36 health facilities are still partially functioning in the enclave, and all of them are based in southern Gaza.

Strikes also hit the southern town of Khan Younis, killing 55 people in the past 24 hours, according to the Palestinian Wafa news agency. Israel has now ordered Palestinians to leave large swaths of the southern city, sparking widespread fear, Mahmoud reported.

Israeli attacks have struck parts of Rafah, where most displaced Palestinians have sought shelter.

One elderly Palestinian man in Rafah told Al Jazeera he had never seen the level of violence Gaza is enduring in his entire life. "I'm 76 years old and I've lived through many wars and conflict. But I've never seen anything like this," he said. "The sheer level of destruction and systemic killing of civilians is shocking."

Ten weeks of Israeli attacks have killed more than 20,000 Palestinians, including 8,000 children. Rescuers have warned that, due to continuing bombardment, they are unable to reach many of the wounded in northern Gaza. Palestinian health officials have said they lack basic medicine and equipment to treat the injured and sick.

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