

More than 200 dead in 24 hours in Gaza as Israeli raids intensify



A mourner reacts next to the bodies of Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks at Nasser hospital in Khan Younis in southern Gaza [Bassam Masoud/Reuters] Death toll in Gaza during the 11-week assault hits 20,258 while 53,688 others are wounded.

Khan Younis, December 24 (RHC)-- At least 201 Palestinians have been killed and nearly 370 wounded by Israeli forces in the past 24 hours in Gaza as the assault on the besieged enclave nears its 12th week. Bombing in central Gaza's Bureij refugee camp killed at least eight Palestinians, including children, on Saturday while another attack on Jabalia camp is believed to have killed dozens more. Thousands more

bodies are believed to be trapped under the rubble across the strip.

Al Jazeera's Tareq Abu Azzoum, reporting from Rafah, said the Israeli attacks across Gaza "have become much more intense." "The bombardment and the shelling of the northern parts of the territory continue as dead bodies have been found decomposed after days of fighting in the ground in these areas," he said.

Al Jazeera TV said the decomposed bodies, some of them left unattended for 20 days in the rubble and streets, were finally buried by Gaza's Civil Defense team on Saturday. Almost all of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced and forced to live in flimsy tents or on the streets in the southern part of the strip, where widespread hunger has been reported.

Israel has long urged the Palestinians to leave northern areas of Gaza but its forces have also been bombarding neighbourhoods in central and southern parts of the tiny coastal enclave. "Where should we go to? There is no place safe," Ziad, a medic and father of six, told the Reuters news agency by phone. "They ask people to head to [the central Gaza city of] Deir el-Balah, where they bomb day and night."

Israel has said 144 of its soldiers have been killed since it launched its ground incursion on October 20, two weeks after Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on its soil, killing 1,147 people and taking 240 captives into the enclave.

More than 100 captives are still believed to be in Gaza after a number of people were exchanged during a weeklong truce last month. The Israeli government says of those still in Gaza, 22 are dead. Hamas on Saturday said it had lost contact with a group it said was responsible for five of the Israeli captives due to Israeli bombardment.

There is a possibility the captives were killed during an Israeli raid, Abu Ubaida, spokesman of Hamas's armed wing, the Qassam Brigades, said.

There was no immediate response from Israeli authorities about Hamas's statement.

Drawing on various information sources, an Israeli government-appointed committee has been declaring some hostages dead in absentia. Hamas has not confirmed these accounts but has warned Israel that "time is running out" for the captives.

Osama Hamdan, Hamas representative in Beirut, on Saturday, said there will be no negotiations with Israel on the exchange of captives until the onslaught on Gaza stops. "If Israel wants to recover its prisoners alive, it must stop the war," he said.

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