

UN reports large number of gunshot wounds following flour massacre

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United Nations, March 2 (RHC)--A United Nations team and medical officials have reported seeing "a large number" of gunshot wounds among Palestinians in Gaza after Israeli troops opened fire near an aid

convoy, which has triggered global condemnation and calls for justice.

Their claims confirm numerous testimonies by witnesses that Israeli gunfire killed and wounded scores of Palestinians desperately seeking food aid on Thursday, contradicting Israel's initial claims people were hurt due to a stampede and trampling.

At least 117 Palestinians were killed and more than 750 wounded during the "flour massacre" at the Nabulsi Roundabout on the southwestern side of Gaza City, after Israeli troops opened fire on the crowd.

On Friday a UN team visited some of the wounded in Gaza City's al-Shifa Hospital, and saw a "large number of gunshot wounds", UN chief Antonio Guterres' spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said. The hospital received 70 of the dead, and about 200 wounded were still there during the team's visit, Dujarric said.

He was not aware of the team examining those killed, but said that "from what they saw in terms of the patients who were alive getting treatments is that there was a large number of gunshot wounds".

Georgios Petropoulos of the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said he had seen people with gunshot wounds sustained during the deadly attack. "It is one day after the tragic events at the Beach Road checkpoint, where hundreds of people lost their lives and were injured," Petropoulos said in a video report, standing in front of al-Shifa Hospital.

"We have seen people with gunshot wounds. We have seen amputees, and we have seen children as young as 12 that were injured yesterday [Thursday]," he said in the video shared on X early on Saturday. "These events cannot be allowed to go on."

The head of a Gaza City hospital that treated some of the Palestinians wounded in the bloodshed said on Friday that more than 80 percent of the injured had been struck by gunfire, suggesting there was heavy shooting by Israeli troops. Mohammed Salha, the acting director of Al-Awda Hospital, told The Associated Press that of the 176 wounded brought to the facility, 142 had gunshot wounds and the other 34 showed injuries from a stampede. He could not address the cause of death of those killed, because the bodies were taken to government-run hospitals to be counted.

Dr Hussam Abu Safia, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, said all the casualties it admitted were hit by "bullets and shrapnel from occupation forces", referring to Israel. The majority of the injured taken there had gunshot wounds in the upper part of their bodies, and many of the deaths were from gunshots to the head, neck or chest, he said.

The bloodshed underscored how the chaos of Israel's almost five-month-old offensive has crippled the effort to bring aid to Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians, a quarter of whom the United Nations says face starvation.

Reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, Al Jazeera's Bernard Smith said the Israeli military "initially tried to pin the blame on the crowd", saying that dozens were hurt as a consequence of being crushed and trampled in a stampede when aid trucks arrived.

"And then, after some pushing, the Israelis went on to say that their troops felt threatened, that hundreds of troops approached their troops in a way they posed a threat to them so they responded by opening fire," Smith added. However, they didn't explain how those people posed a threat.

Witnesses insisted that the stampede happened only after Israeli troops started firing at people looking for food. The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor based in Gaza said Israeli forces intentionally opened fire on the crowd of aid recipients to "intimidate" anyone struggling to get a handful of food.

The human rights monitor published a report on Thursday stating that evidence shows that dozens of victims suffered gunshot wounds, “rather than being run over or crushed, in contrast to what the Israeli army spokesman claimed”.

Footage released by the Israeli army includes audible evidence of gunfire coming from Israeli tanks positioned near the coast, it said. The group identified the bullets’ distinct sound audible in the footage as 5.56 bullets coming from an automatic weapon used by the Israeli army.

The majority of those present at the scene, including those who had initially been far from the aid trucks, are seen in the video fleeing from the trucks and running in the opposite direction, it added. “This indicates that the danger did not originate from the trucks themselves or from the surrounding crowd of people, but rather from an outside source that terrified everyone in the area, both close to and far away from the trucks,” the monitor said. “Furthermore, the video clip released by the Israeli army does not depict any ramming operations, which aligns with numerous survivors’ accounts of being shot in the back as they attempted to flee the scene.”

Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, on Friday said that “a famine is almost inevitable” in Gaza unless things change. Laerke cited the near-total closure of commercial food imports, the “trickle of trucks” coming in with food aid, and the “massive access constraints” to moving around inside Gaza.

The United Nations has particularly cited restrictions on access to northern Gaza, where residents have been reduced to eating animal fodder and even leaves. Human Rights Watch earlier this week said Israel was violating the orders of the International Court of Justice by blocking aid to Palestinians who are facing near-famine conditions after nearly five months of Israeli bombardment that has killed more than 30,000 people, most of them children and women.

“The Israeli government is starving Gaza’s 2.3 million Palestinians, putting them in even more peril than before the World Court’s binding order,” Omar Shakir, Israel and Palestine director at Human Rights Watch, said on February 26th.

“The Israeli government has simply ignored the court’s ruling, and in some ways even intensified its repression, including further blocking lifesaving aid.” The UN refugee agency, UNRWA, has also raised concerns against Israel’s blocking of aid.

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