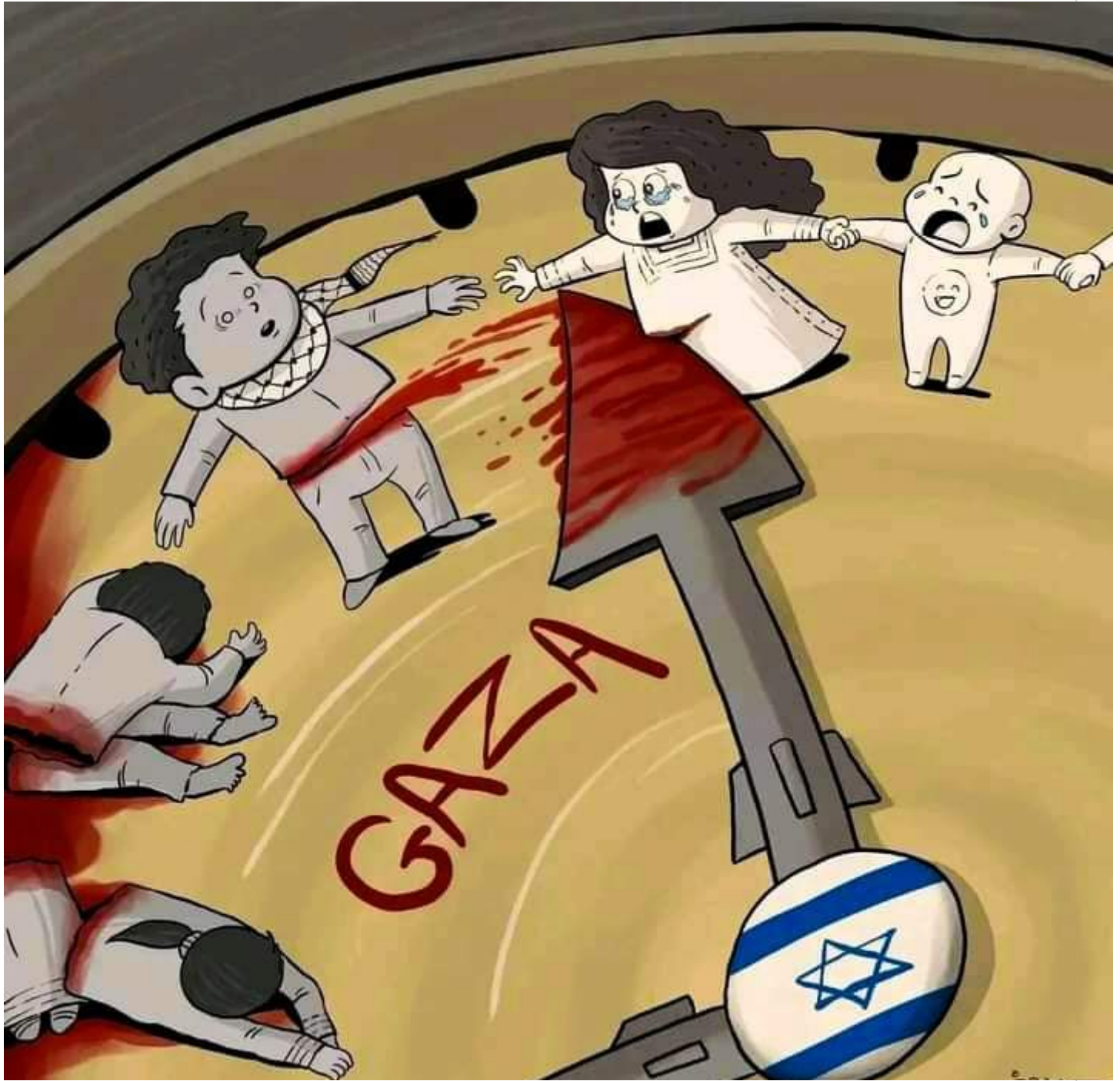


*Israel signals rejection of  
ceasefire proposal accepted by  
 Hamas*

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Tel Aviv, May 7 (RHC)-- The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has agreed to a ceasefire proposal in Gaza, where it has fought a seven-month Israeli aggression that has left tens of thousands dead.

A short statement from Hamas on Monday said that head of the group's politburo, Ismail Haniyeh, had informed Qatari and Egyptian mediators that it accepted their proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza.

The Israeli regime, however, appears not to have accepted the deal.

If the ceasefire agreement takes effect, it would be the first truce since a week-long pause in the fighting in November 2023.

The statement by Hamas came hours after senior officials in the group said efforts for reaching a ceasefire would stop if Israel goes ahead with its plans to invade the city of Rafah in southern Gaza, where more than half of the territory's population of 2.3 million people has been sheltering from Israel's brutal bombardments in other regions.

Israel on Monday ordered people in some parts of Rafah to evacuate in an apparent move to prepare for an invasion of the city. The U.S. government said it had warned the Israeli regime against a major operation in Rafah... stopping far short of condemning the Tel Aviv regime for its genocidal aggression.

Speaking to reporters after Hamas' announcement on the ceasefire, the Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari would not confirm whether Israel would go ahead with plans to attack Rafah. However, he said that the Israeli regime will exhaust "every possibility regarding negotiations and returning the hostages."

A senior Hamas official told Al Jazeera that the proposal presented by Qatar and Egypt consists of a three-stage plan, and includes the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the return of Palestinian refugees, and a prisoner exchange.

Khalil al-Hayya, deputy head of Hamas politburo in Gaza, explained that the plan is interconnected in terms of the stages of its implementation.

In the first stage of the agreement, the Israeli military will withdraw to areas adjacent to Gaza, he said. In the second stage, he said, a permanent ceasefire and cessation of hostilities will be declared.

Al-Hayya insisted that the ball was now in the Israeli regime's court whether to accept the deal and end the war. The Hamas official also said that the mediators promised that U.S. President Joe Biden had signaled a commitment to ensuring the implementation of the proposed deal.

Biden spoke over the phone with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday to warn him that Washington is concerned about Israel's Rafah invasion plans.

Saudi Arabia also warned of the dangers of Israel targeting Rafah as part of its "bloody" and "systematic campaign to storm all areas of the Gaza Strip and displace its residents".

Nearly 35,000 people have been killed in Gaza since Israel launched its aggression on the enclave on October 7th last year.

The invasion came hours after Hamas carried out a brief but extensive military operation into the Israeli-occupied territories near Gaza, killing nearly 1,200 Israeli settlers and military forces.

Hamas also took some 250 captives during its anti-Israeli operation in October. Under growing pressure from settler communities living in the occupied Palestine, the Israeli regime has been pushing for the release of the captives as part of a potential ceasefire deal with Hamas.

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