

Hamas official rejects talk of new negotiations with Israel

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People hold Israeli flags as protesters hold a rally in front of the AIPAC offices demanding a ceasefire and the end of Israel's attacks on Gaza, in New York City, US [File: Eduardo Munoz/Reuters]

Beirut, May 26 (RHC)-- Hamas official Osama Hamdan has said that there is no need for new negotiations with Israel, amid Israeli media reports that there is an intention to renew Gaza truce talks. In a phone interview with Al Jazeera Arabic on Saturday, Hamdan said that the immediate requirement is for

Israel to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and for all aggression to stop.

“We do not need new negotiations,” he said, adding that Hamas has already agreed to a ceasefire proposal that Israel has rejected. “There is no guarantee that it [Israel] will accept new proposals to go to negotiations ... If there are no serious guarantees, this means giving Israel more time to continue the aggression,” he added.

Earlier this month, Hamas approved a proposal for a ceasefire in the seven-month Gaza war put forward by mediators Qatar and Egypt although Israel said the proposal falls short of its demands.

On Saturday, according to Israeli media, officials involved in the negotiations said the Israeli government intended to renew talks for a Gaza captive release deal in the coming days, after a meeting with mediators in Paris.

According to the reports, Israeli intelligence chief David Barnea had agreed to a new framework for the stalled negotiations with mediators — CIA Director Bill Burns and Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani.

The new offer was drafted by the Israeli negotiating team and contains possible solutions to points of disagreement in previous discussions. But defense ministry officials believe that even if Israel agrees to a temporary ceasefire, it will be able to return to war again when needed after months.

Hamas has insisted that it is not willing to accept only a temporary ceasefire, but that an end to the fighting has to be permanent.

Israel has insisted that the war will not end before its goals are met, including the total defeat of Hamas. However, Israel is coming under growing international pressure to stop and is increasingly isolated. Among recent blows for Israel are an International Court of Justice order for it to stop its Rafah offensive, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court seeking arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, and a decision by Ireland, Norway and Spain to recognise Palestine.

Meanwhile, Washington said top diplomat Antony Blinken had also spoken with Israeli war cabinet minister Benny Gantz about new efforts to achieve a ceasefire and reopen the border crossing in Gaza's far-southern city of Rafah.

Al-Qahera News said Cairo was also continuing “its efforts to reactivate ceasefire negotiations and exchange prisoners and detainees”.

It added that Egypt was exerting “all kinds of pressure on Israel to urgently let in the aid and fuel” stranded at the Rafah crossing after its closure by Israel earlier this month.

But a Hamas official denied Israeli media reports that Gaza ceasefire talks would resume in Cairo on Tuesday. “There is no date,” the unnamed Hamas official told the Reuters news agency when asked about the reports.

Talks aimed at reaching a hostage release and truce deal for Gaza ground to a halt this month after Israel launched a military operation in Rafah.

At least 35,903 people have been killed and 80,420 wounded in Israel's war on Gaza since October 7th. The revised death toll in Israel from Hamas's attack stands at 1,139, with dozens still held captive.

On Saturday, thousands of Israelis rallied in Tel Aviv to demand urgent government action to bring home captives held in Gaza, after the bodies of several were retrieved.

Another protest, calling for the resignation of Netanyahu and an early election, was also held nearby.

Despite the immense pressure, Netanyahu and his government have so far failed to strike a deal with Hamas, with many critics doubting their desire to reach a deal.

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