

Israel recovers bodies of six captives held in Gaza



(COMBO) This combination of pictures created on September 01, 2024 shows undated portraits provided on September 1, 2024, by The Hostages Families Forum Headquarters, representing families of Israeli hostages held by Palestinian militants in Gaza, showing hostages (clockwork from top-L) Almog Sarusi, Alex Lubnov, Carmel Gat, Ori Danino, Eden Yerushalmi and Hersh Goldberg-Polin at unspecified locations. The Israeli military said on September 1 that it had found the bodies of six hostages in a tunnel in the southern Gaza Strip, including a US-Israeli and a Russian-Israeli. (Photo by the Hostages Families Forum Headquarters / AFP)

Tel Aviv, September 1 (RHC)-- Israel's military has announced that its troops have recovered the bodies of six captives, including a dual US national, from a tunnel in southern Gaza, as it continued its 11-month long, deadly assault on the Palestinian enclave.

More than 40,000 Palestinians have been killed since Israel launched war on Gaza on October 7 following an attack led by Palestinian group Hamas that left more than 1,100 people dead. The Palestinian fighters took about 250 captives in the wake of the attack. The coastal enclave has since been turned into rubble amid non-stop bombardment as Israel has been accused of stalling a ceasefire deal to free the captives.

The military said on Sunday that their remains were recovered “from an underground tunnel in the Rafah area” and returned to Israel where they were formally identified. It claimed that the captives were killed not long before their bodies were recovered.

The captives were identified as Almog Sarusi, Alex Lobanov, Carmel Gat, Ori Danino, Eden Yerushalmi and Hersh Goldberg-Polin.

Senior Hamas official Izzat al-Risheq said the six captives were killed in Israeli air strikes. Al-Risheq also blamed the United States for its “bias, support and partnership” in the 11-month war on the besieged territory.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged to “settle the score” with Hamas, saying “we will hunt you down.” “Those who kill hostages do not want an agreement” for a Gaza truce, Netanyahu said.

But a forum of captives’ families, who have been critical of Netanyahu’s handling of the issue, called for a massive protest later on Sunday, demanding a “complete halt of the country” to push for the implementation of a ceasefire and release of the remaining captives.

“A deal for the return of the hostages has been on the table for over two months. Were it not for the delays, sabotage, and excuses those whose deaths we learned about this morning would likely still be alive. It’s time to bring our hostages home,” the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said in a statement.

In a video statement on X, opposition leader Yair Lapid called on “every citizen whose heart is broken” to take to the streets to demand a ceasefire.

“Netanyahu and the death cabinet decided not to rescue the hostages. I call on the Histadrut [major trade union], the employers and the local authorities to shut down the economy,” he added.

Menachem Klein, professor of political science at Israel’s Bar-Ilan University, blamed Netanyahu and his cabinet for “refusing” to strike a deal to secure the release of the captives, a move he said had “signed [the Israeli captives’] death sentence”.

“Israel refuses to come down to reality,” he told Al Jazeera. “That’s the problem. And it cost the life of Israeli hostages.”

In a statement, U.S. President Joe Biden said he was “devastated and outraged” of the death of the six captives, including Israeli-American Goldberg-Polin.

Biden, whose administration has backed and funded Israeli bombardment of Gaza, pledged that “Hamas leaders will pay for these crimes. And we will keep working around the clock for a deal to secure the release of the remaining hostages.”

A ceasefire deal put forth by Biden in May, which called for release of captives, was rejected by Netanyahu.

Three Israelis killed in shooting attack near Hebron amid deadly West Bank raids

Days earlier, Kaid Farhan al-Kadi, who belongs to a Bedouin community in southern Israel, was rescued about a kilometre away, the military said.

The Israeli publication YNet quoted an unnamed Israeli official as saying that three of the captives who were killed were on a list approved by Hamas on July 2 for release. Al Jazeera, however, could not independently verify the report.

Among those confirmed dead was Carmel Gat, whose cousin of Gil Dickmann has been holding daily protests to put pressure on the Netanyahu government to negotiate with Hamas for the release of the remaining captives.

For Dickmann, the situation has been personal. On October 7, his aunt Kinneret Gat was also killed in the Be'eri kibbutz in southern Israel. "Benjamin Netanyahu doesn't listen!" Dickmann had said during one of the protests. "Benjamin Netanyahu, leave politics out of the negotiation room!"

About 100 captives still remain in Gaza while 105 were released in a deal with Hamas, which has set ceasefire as a condition to release the remaining captives.

But Israel has been accused of war crimes and atrocities against Palestinians. The International Criminal Court persecutor has sought arrest warrants against Netanyahu and his Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes. Warrants were also requested for two Hamas leaders.

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