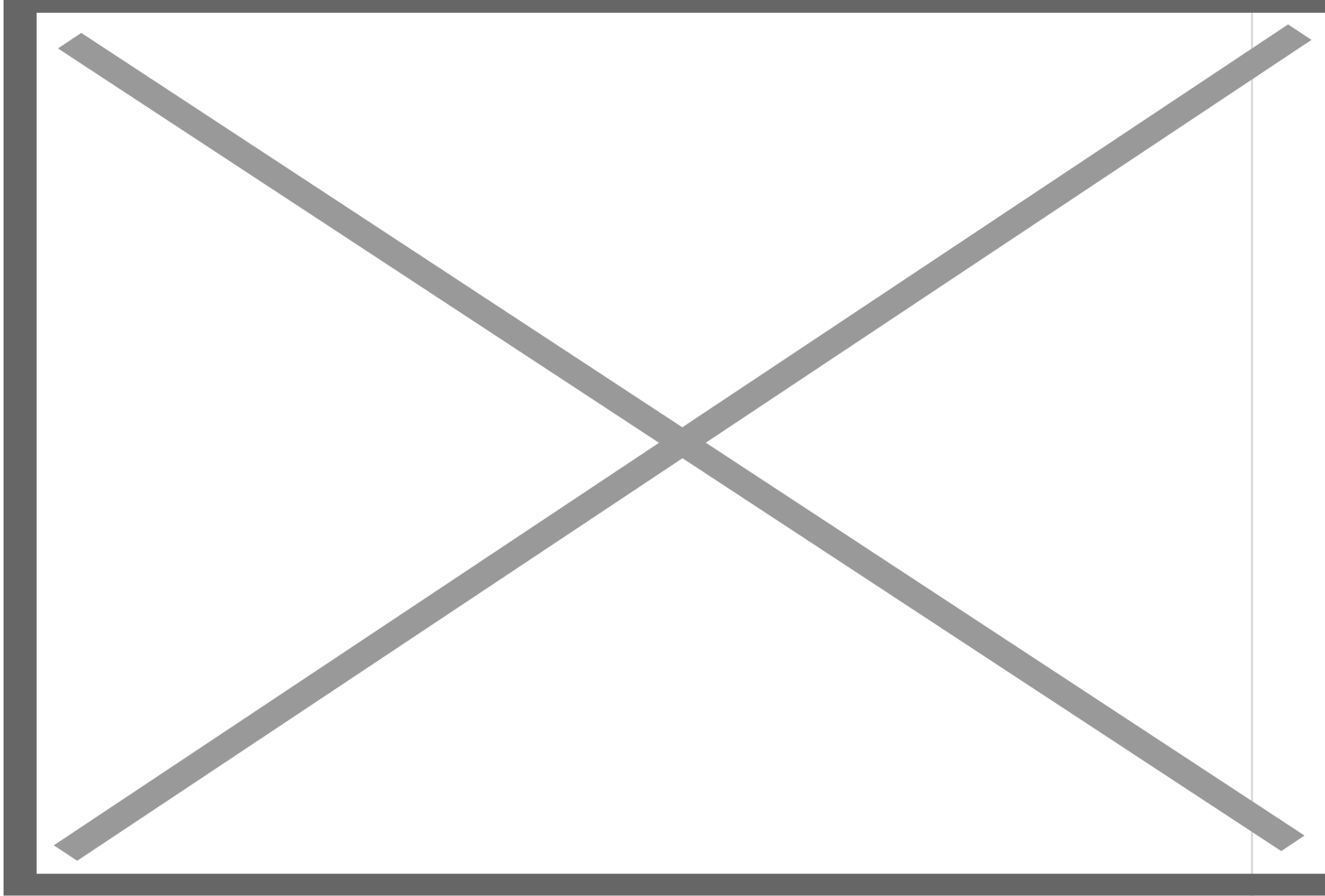


Israel launches ground offensive on Jabalia again, killing at least 17

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A Palestinian man wounded in an Israeli strike reacts as he sits on the floor at a hospital, in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip on October 5, 2024 [File: Hussam Al-Zaanin/Reuters]

Gaza City, October 7 (RHC)-- The Israeli military has carried out intense bombardment in the Jabalia refugee camp, killing at least 17 people hours after forcing residents in the area to leave again during its third ground assault on the densely populated camp in northern Gaza since launching the war a year ago.

The Palestinian Civil Defense agency said on Sunday that the death toll included nine children following air attacks and as the army deployed tanks into the area for the first time in months.

The Palestinian Civil Defence spokesperson in Gaza, Mahmoud Basal, added that Jabalia was targeted with multiple strikes overnight, resulting in many casualties. Residents in Jabalia have described the intensified attacks as some of the worst in months.

"Dozens of explosions from air strikes and tank shelling shook the ground and buildings. It felt like the early days of the war," Raed, 52, from Jabalia, told the Reuters news agency before his family left for Gaza City on Sunday. On Sunday morning, the Israeli military said its forces had "successfully" encircled the refugee camp and were operating in the area.

The army said the decision was taken after intelligence indicated the "presence of terrorists and terror infrastructure in the area of Jabalia ... as well as efforts by Hamas to rebuild its operational capabilities in the area".

Israel has destroyed hospitals, schools and residential areas, claiming Hamas was operating under them but providing no proof of its claims. Rights organisations say these attacks amount to war crimes. Meanwhile, the armed wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad has said its fighters have targeted "a command and control room" belonging to Israeli forces who were trying to get into Jabalia refugee camp.

Reporting from near the Kamal Adwan Hospital in Jabalia, journalist Moath al-Kahlout said that the situation in the north was "deteriorating," adding that an "entire family" had been killed in the overnight attacks. "The Israeli army dropped leaflets on the Jabalia refugee camp ordering people to flee their homes, and this alarming development suggests that the Israeli army is preparing for further attacks. This may lead to more civilian deaths and injuries," he said.

Military and security analyst Elijah Magnier says Israel's renewed ground invasion of northern Gaza was "inevitable" as far-right Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich claimed that Palestinian armed resistance groups had recruited "more than a thousand people."

"Israelis have returned to Gaza several times, they've returned to the north several times, they've destroyed the infrastructure, the hospitals, everything," Magnier told Al Jazeera. "They will continue doing so unless [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu stops this war."

The Israeli army has called on Palestinians in northern Gaza to flee to designated "safe zones" in southern and central Gaza as it begins a renewed ground offensive. But no place in Gaza is safe for Palestinians, including the so-called "safe zones", campaigners say.

But as some Palestinians begin making the journey southwards, Gaza's Interior Ministry has called on residents to ignore Israel's evacuation orders.

"Israeli claims about the presence of safe zones in southern Gaza are lies as Israel commits crimes and massacres in all areas of the enclave," the ministry said in a statement. "We call on citizens in northern Gaza to ignore Israeli threats."

Reporting from Deir el-Balah in central Gaza, Al Jazeera's Hind Khoudary said the difference this time, compared to earlier evacuation orders, is that it is "not only blocks but whole areas."

"Some of those Palestinians who were in the north have refused to evacuate despite the attacks and also the starvation and harsh conditions the blockade has imposed on them. They still refuse to leave,"

Khoudary said. She added that a member of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was also targeted in Sunday's strikes and was killed.

According to Gaza's Health Ministry, at least 41,870 Palestinians have been killed and 97,166 others injured since the war began on October 7.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES]

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