Israeli air strikes massacre women and children in Gaza's so-called humanitarian safe zones

Gaza City, January 8 (RHC)-- Many women and young children have been reported killed in Israel's latest attacks on Gaza, with nearly 50 people killed and dozens wounded in a single day as the overall death toll in the war-ravaged Palestinian territory pushes towards 46,000.

Medical sources reported that at least 49 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli attacks since the early hours of Tuesday morning. The dead included at least five children killed by Israeli strikes on tents sheltering displaced people in al-Mawasi – a desolate coastal area in southern Gaza designated a "humanitarian safe zone" by the Israeli military.

Despite hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinian civilians crammed into makeshift tent camps in al-Mawasi, Israel's military has continually attacked the site, claiming, without providing evidence, that it is targeting Hamas.

Gaza's Ministry of Health said late on Tuesday that Israeli forces had carried out three "massacres" of Palestinian families in the past 24 hours, in which 31 people were killed and 57 were wounded.

The overall death toll from Israeli attacks on the territory had now risen to 45,885 people killed and more than 109,000 injured in the 15 months since Israel's war on the enclave began, on October 7, 2023.

Ahmed al-Farra, director of the children's ward at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, told the Associated Press (AP) news agency that five children were killed in the same tent as they sheltered together in al-Mawasi.

Their bodies were among the eight children and five women brought to the hospital on Tuesday. Israeli strikes also hit a car and two residential houses in the Khan Younis area, the hospital said, adding that two of those killed in the attacks were men, while two people killed in the vehicle were unidentifiable.

In the hospital's morgue, bodies lay on stretchers or were stacked on metal shelves. A young girl in a fuzzy pink sweatshirt rested with her head in the lap of another dead child. Other corpses, some disfigured by Israeli explosions, were covered in blankets, the AP reports.

Al Jazeera's correspondent in central Gaza, Tareq Abu Azzoum, said Israeli attacks had "ramped up" across Gaza over the past 12 hours, in particular on the al-Mawasi area.

Hardships suffered by Palestinians in Gaza had also been exacerbated by Israel's continued attacks on humanitarian aid convoys and the hijacking by "Palestinian criminal gangs" of fuel tankers, which had jeopardised the territory's already struggling hospitals.

The European Hospital in Khan Younis has now warned that it will run out of fuel within the next 24 hours, Abu Azzoum said. Al-Aqsa Hospital, in central Gaza's Deir el-Balah, has also reported that it will be forced to cut electricity due to fuel shortages caused by Israel's restrictions on delivery of supplies to Gaza and the hijackings.

"So, the scene on the ground is a bit chaotic and the atmosphere is quite charged with fear and anticipation of more air strikes looming on the horizon too," Abu Azzoum said.

Tom Fletcher, the United Nations under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and the coordinator for emergency relief, said in a statement that attempts by aid workers to save lives in Gaza were "at breaking point".

Fletcher recounted how Israeli forces had recently attacked a food distribution point operated by a partner of the UN's World Food Programme (WFP), injuring three people. Israeli troops had also fired 16 bullets at a clearly marked UN convoy. And Palestinian gangs had hijacked six fuel tankers, leaving hardly any for humanitarian operations.

"These incidents are part of a dangerous pattern of sabotage and deliberate disruption," Fletcher said. "Statements by Israeli authorities vilify our aid workers even as the military attacks them. Community volunteers who accompany our convoys are being targeted," he said. "There is now a perception that it is dangerous to protect aid convoys but safe to loot them," he added.

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