

Israeli cabinet approves Gaza ceasefire deal with Hamas



Tel Aviv, January 17 (RHC)-- Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet has approved a deal with Hamas for a ceasefire in Gaza after more than 460 days of war in which Israeli forces have killed more than 46,788 Palestinians and wounded 110,453.

The deal, which was approved in the early hours of Saturday morning and is expected to take effect from Sunday, involves the exchange of captives held in Gaza for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, after which the terms of a permanent end to the war will be finalised.

With longstanding divisions apparent among ministers, Israel delayed key meetings of its security cabinet and cabinet, which were supposed to vote on Thursday, blaming Hamas for the hold-up.

Netanyahu's office had claimed that Hamas reneged on key parts of the agreement to obtain last-minute concessions. But Hamas senior official Izzat al-Risheq insisted that the group remained committed to the ceasefire deal.

Hamas said in a statement earlier on Friday that obstacles that arose in relation to the terms of the Gaza ceasefire agreement had been resolved at dawn that day.

Netanyahu's office said Hamas would start freeing captives "as early as Sunday" providing the deal was given a go-ahead by the Israeli cabinet.

The ceasefire agreement was announced by mediators Qatar, Egypt and the United States on Wednesday. The deal outlines a six-week initial ceasefire, the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from many areas of Gaza and a surge in humanitarian aid.

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