

Rescuers find dozens of bodies in Gaza rubble amid Israel-Hamas ceasefire



Palestinian officials estimate 10,000 bodies are under the debris covering Gaza after the devastating 15-month war.

Buildings lie in ruins along as-Saftawi Street in Jabalia in northern Gaza [Omar al-Qaittaa/AFP]

Gaza City, January 21 (RHC)-- Palestinians have recovered dozens of bodies buried under rubble in Gaza and are searching for thousands more as the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas continues to hold for a second day.

Medical sources told Al Jazeera on Monday that the bodies of 97 Palestinians have been recovered in the destroyed city of Rafah in southern Gaza since the ceasefire took effect the previous day with the release of the first three captives held by Hamas and 90 Palestinians from Israeli jails.

Israeli attacks on Gaza killed more than 47,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and wounded more than 111,000, according to local health authorities. But the Palestinian Civil Defense agency said it estimated there are 10,000 bodies under destroyed structures across the strip.

At least 2,840 bodies were melted and there are no traces of them, said Mahmoud Basal, spokesperson of the Palestinian Civil Emergency Services in Gaza.

Meanwhile, many displaced residents returning to their neighbourhoods found them almost unrecognisable due to the devastation from more than 15 months of war. "[The level of destruction] was a big shock, and the amount [of people] feeling shocked is countless because of what happened to their homes. It's destruction, total destruction," Mohamed Gomaa, who lost his brother and nephew in the war, told the Reuters news agency.

"It's not like an earthquake or a flood, no no. What happened is a war of extermination."

Meanwhile, more than 630 aid trucks entered the Gaza Strip on Sunday, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the Security Council on Monday, with at least 300 of those trucks going to the enclave's north, where the UN said famine looms.

With a growing flow of aid into the Palestinian enclave, residents flocked into markets with some expressing happiness at the lower prices and the presence of new food items like imported chocolates.

"The prices have gone down, the war is over and the crossing is open to more goods," Aya Mohammad-Zaki, a displaced woman from Gaza City sheltering in Deir el-Balah in central Gaza, told Reuters.

Attention is also starting to shift to the rebuilding of the coastal enclave, which the Israeli military demolished in retaliation for Hamas-led attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023. Those assaults killed 1,139 people with about 250 taken captive into Gaza, according to Israeli tallies.

A UN damage assessment released this month showed that clearing more than 50 million tonnes of rubble left in the aftermath of Israel's bombardment could take 21 years and cost up to \$1.2 billion.

A UN report from last year said rebuilding Gaza's shattered homes could take at least until 2040 but could drag on for many decades. The debris is believed to be contaminated with asbestos because some refugee camps struck during the war are known to have been built with the material.

A UN Development Programme official said on Sunday that development in Gaza has been set back by 69 years as a result of the conflict.

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