

# *Gazans return to devastation; more than 400,000 homes destroyed or damaged*

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Gaza City, January 22 (RHC)-- New images from Gaza show scenes of total devastation wrought during Israel's 15 months of horrific bombardment, while a UN report says over 436,000 homes have been destroyed or damaged across the narrow coastal enclave.

A ceasefire deal came into effect on January 19, allowing the besieged people of Gaza to return to their destroyed homes and search for missing loved ones, who are still buried under the vast sea of rubble.

The destruction is enormous and frightening, said the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on Tuesday. It said approximately 92 percent of residences are left in ruins, particularly in the north.

Rebuilding those homes could take until 2040 in the most optimistic scenario, with total reconstruction across the territory costing as much as \$40 billion, according to the United Nations estimates.

Gaza's schools, which have been used as shelters for the displaced, including UN schools, have also been a target of Israel's airstrikes since the beginning of the war in October 2023.

Two-thirds of Gaza's pre-war structures – over 170,000 buildings – have been damaged or flattened, according to UN satellite data (UNOSAT) in December. Palestinian data shows that Israel's war has led to the destruction of over 200 government facilities, 136 schools and universities, 823 mosques, and three churches.

Rik Peeperkorn, the World Health Organization (WHO) representative in Palestine, said the ceasefire "brings hope, but immense challenges lie ahead." "Addressing the massive needs and restoring the health system will be an extremely complex and challenging task, given the scale of destruction, operational complexity and constraints involved."

Gaza's Civil Defense agency – the strip's main emergency response service – says it feared there were more than 10,000 bodies still buried under the rubble. The agency's spokesman Mahmoud Basal said they hoped to recover the dead within 100 days, but were likely to be delayed by a deficit of bulldozers and other essential equipment.

According to figures released by Gaza's health ministry on Tuesday, over 47,100 people have been killed, with the toll continuing to rise as new bodies were found under the rubble.

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