Deadly, sober Good Friday as 50 people killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza

Palestinian Christians carry the traditional Greek Orthodox Epitaphios, a richly embroidered fabric depicting the body of Jesus Christ after he was taken down the cross, as they celebrate Good Friday at the church of Saint Porphyrius in Gaza City   [Omar Al-Qattaa/AFP]

Gaza City, April 18 (RHC)-- Israeli strikes on Gaza have killed at least 50 Palestinians in one day as Christians mark Good Friday in the besieged and bombarded enclave.

More than half of the casualties were in Gaza City and northern Gaza, but deadly attacks took place across the Palestinian Strip, including in Khan Younis and Rafah in the south, medical sources told Al Jazeera on Friday.

The Israeli military said troops were operating in the Shaboura and Tal as-Sultan areas near Rafah, as well as in northern Gaza, where Israel has taken control of large areas east of Gaza City.

On Friday, Israel's defence minister, Israel Katz, repeated that Israel intended to achieve its war aims. "The [Israeli army] is currently working towards a decisive victory in all arenas, the release of the hostages, and the defeat of Hamas in Gaza," he said in a statement.

Palestinian Christians in Gaza however continued to hold temperate gatherings leading up to Easter, amid the attacks. Speaking to Al Jazeera from a local church, Ihab Ayyad said he used to gather with other congregants and visit his neighbours' homes every year to celebrate.

"This year, we didn't make the visits because of the total destruction everywhere, as the [Israeli] occupation forces have levelled most of the houses of my relatives and my neighbours," Ayyad said. "A lot of my relatives and neighbours were martyred or displaced in different places. We haven't celebrated because we feel very sad."

Ramez al-Soury said he used to travel out of Gaza to Bethlehem or Jerusalem for the holy week. But now, an "atmosphere of war" permeates Gaza. "The death smell is everywhere. The smell of killing and destruction is putting a lot of pressure on us," he said.

Reporting from Gaza City, Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud said the Christian community is holding onto their faith and has gathered at one of the oldest churches in the world in Gaza – not in defiance but in devotion.

"In Gaza, Good Friday is the power of faith and the quiet strength of those who still believe in peace even when the world around them is nothing but a stage filled with violence and death," he said.

Rituals to mark Good Friday and Easter have also been held in the occupied West Bank. There are about 50,000 Palestinian Christians in the region. Israeli authorities, however, require them to acquire permits to travel to Jerusalem, making it difficult for many to join those celebrations.

Moreover, Israeli settlers and the military also attacked Palestinian people on their land in the town of Biddya, in the Salfit governorate in the occupied West Bank, according to Al Jazeera Arabic on Friday, tempering the celebrations. The Palestine Red Crescent said that a Palestinian was injured in the attack.

Local sources also told Al Jazeera Arabic that dozens of settlers stormed Jabal al-Urma, a hill in the town of Beita in the Nablus governorate, under the protection of the Israeli army.

Settlers are Israeli citizens who live illegally on private Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Israeli settler and military violence has soared across the West Bank – particularly in the north of the territory – since the war on Gaza began in October 2023. The United Nations has said this violence has displaced roughly 40,000 Palestinians since Israel began a new military operation in the occupied West Bank in January.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA]

Radio Habana Cuba