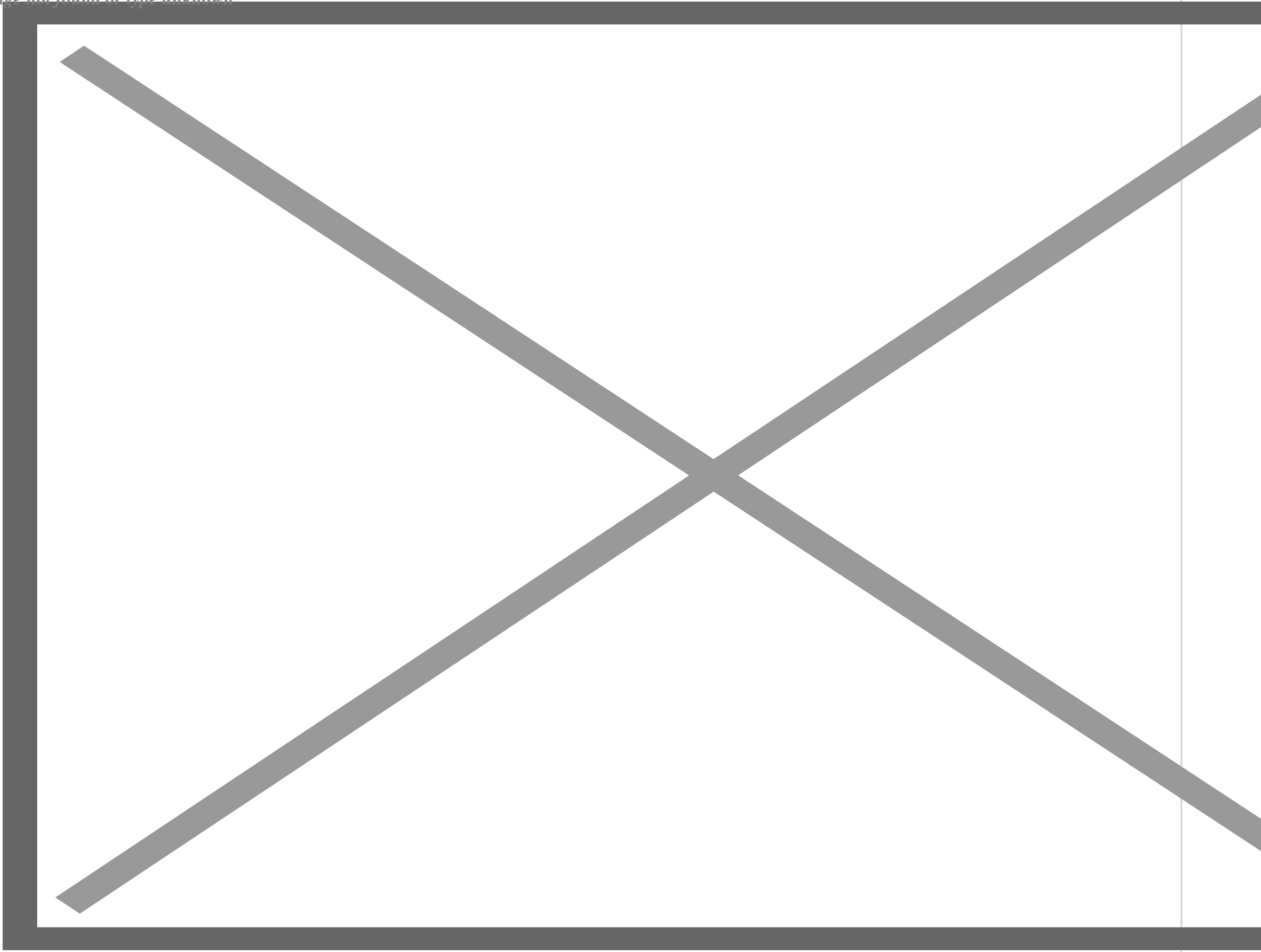


Palestinians return to destroyed Gaza homes after ceasefire

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A Palestinian woman returns to her destroyed house [Mohammed Salem/Reuters]

Gaza City, May 22 (RHC)-- Thousands of displaced Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip have started returning to their homes to check for damage, while Israelis returned to normal life, as a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took hold after 11 days of deadly fighting.

Palestinian officials on Friday put the reconstruction costs at tens of millions of dollars. Five more bodies were pulled from Gaza's rubble, taking the death toll to 248, including 66 children, with more than 1,900 wounded.

The Israeli military said an Israeli soldier had been killed, as well as 12 civilians, including two children. Hundreds were treated for injuries after rocket salvos caused panic and sent people as far away as Tel Aviv rushing into shelters.

World Health Organization spokeswoman Margaret Harris said Gaza's health facilities were in danger of being overwhelmed by the thousands of injuries. She called for immediate access into the Gaza Strip for health supplies and personnel. "The real challenges are the closures," she told a virtual UN briefing.

Gaza has for years been subjected to an Israeli blockade that restricts the passage of people and goods, as well as restrictions by Egypt.

Fabrizio Carboni, regional director of the International Committee of the Red Cross, echoed WHO's call for urgent medical supplies, adding: "It will take years to rebuild – and even more to rebuild the fractured lives."

Al Jazeera's Harry Fawcett, reporting from Gaza, said that about 1,000 individual homes have been completely destroyed, 700 have been severely damaged, and another 14,000 home units have been partially damaged. "[There is a] ratio of about more than six people per home in this town and in the Strip, that's more than 80,000 people who have lost their homes or had their homes seriously or partially damaged. That is a major catastrophe for this community," he said.

Nazmi Dahdouh, 70, a father of five, said his house in Gaza City was destroyed in an Israeli attack.

"We don't have another home. I'll live in a tent on top of the rubble of my home until it's rebuilt," he told the AFP news agency. Malak Mattar, an artist in Gaza City, told Al Jazeera that the ceasefire had brought relief for her family.

"We are feeling relieved. We are finally able to get long hours of sleep which is something that we've been deprived of for the past 10 or 11 days, so it's such a good thing that we are feeling safe, that there are no bombardments," Mattar said. "We are able now to get food supplies ... so, we are feeling relieved."

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