

Palestinians in Gaza pledge to defy Israel to protest at border

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Palestinian protesters run as tear gas canisters are shot by Israeli forces, during a demonstration by the Israeli fence east of Gaza City, to denounce the Israeli siege of the Palestinian territory [Said Khatib/AFP]

Gaza City, August 23 (RHC)-- Palestinian groups in Gaza have pledged to continue protests along the border to pressure Israel to remove its blockade and to allow for the reconstruction of Gaza following the recent 11-day Israeli assault on the coastal enclave.

The factions, led by Gaza's rulers Hamas, held a press conference on Sunday afternoon east of Gaza near the Israeli fence, where protests took place on Saturday in which scores of Palestinian protesters were wounded by Israeli live fire.

In a joint statement released after the press conference, the groups – which also included Islamic Jihad, the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), as well as other smaller factions – stated that “the Israeli occupation must bear the responsibility for its obstruction of the reconstruction of Gaza, and for the blockade”.

“We call on our people to continue their popular uprising in Gaza and to expand the points of engagement with the occupation, and our popular activity will proceed according to a plan ... we will not accept the continuation of the siege.”

On Saturday, hundreds of Palestinians protested at the fence separating Gaza and Israel to mark the 52nd anniversary of the burning of Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem, and to draw attention to the blockade Israel has imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2007 when Hamas took control of the strip.

Live fire by Israeli forces injured at least 41 Palestinians, including a 13-year-old boy who remains in critical condition after being shot in the neck.

An Israeli soldier was injured and is in critical condition from gunfire from one of the protesters. Videos circulating on social media showed several protesters attempting to grab the Israeli soldier's rifle, visible through a hole in the wall, before one of them pulled a gun and fires into the hole.

On Saturday night, Israeli fighter jets struck Hamas' military positions in the Gaza Strip in response. No casualties were reported.

Ahmed Yousef, a senior Hamas official, told Al Jazeera that it was “natural that the Palestinian people who suffer under a crippling blockade move to take action to pressure Israel and the international community to take responsibility for the situation in Gaza.”

“The Palestinian protesters, and the Palestinian factions, want to raise their voice and remind Israel and especially the international community of their plight, and increasingly so after the recent war on Gaza, and the massive destruction the Israeli military caused.”

The Israeli and Egyptian imposed blockade has crippled Gaza's economy and living conditions have drastically deteriorated after each of the four major military operations that Israel launched on the Gaza Strip since the blockade was imposed.

Over 11 days of fighting in May, Israel bombarded Gaza with air attacks, while Palestinian groups fired rockets into Israel. More than 250 Palestinians were killed, including 67 children and 39 women, and 1,710 people wounded, according to the health ministry in Gaza. Thirteen Israelis were killed, including a five-year-old boy and a 16-year-old girl.

The war also left more than 1,800 housing units in Gaza completely destroyed, and about 16,800 housing units suffered partial damage, according to Gaza's Public Works and Housing Ministry.

Yousef said that “no significant progress” has been made in reconstruction as construction materials are still largely banned due to the Israeli blockade. “The scenes of destruction in Gaza are still everywhere,” he said. “The message that the protesters want to convey is that the situation is unsustainable and its continuation will lead to more action by the Palestinians.”



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