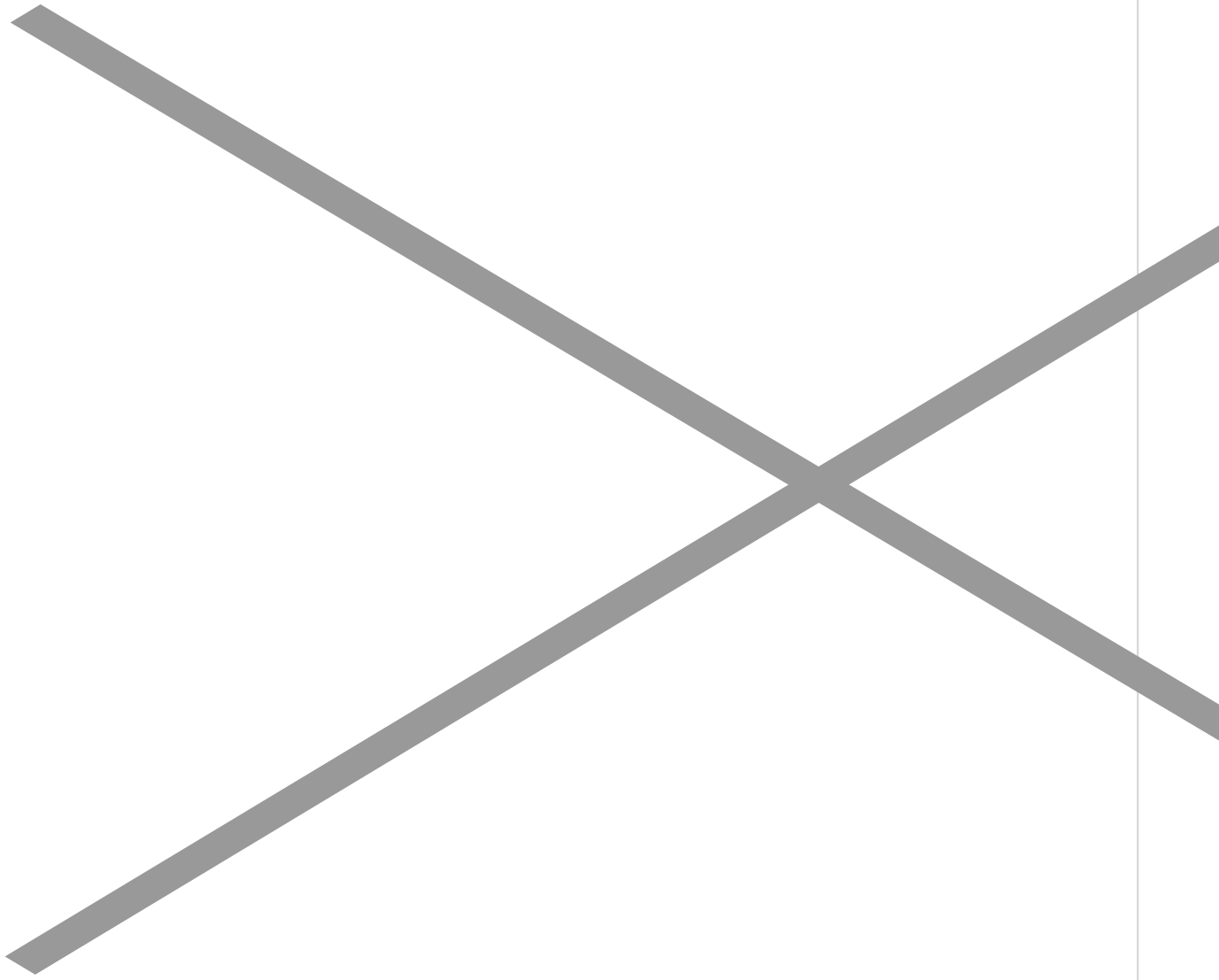


Media reports say Israel thwarted all mediation efforts for Gaza ceasefire

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Cairo, March 7 (RHC)-- News reports from Cairo say that Tel Aviv has thwarted all efforts by mediators to reach a ceasefire agreement in the besieged Gaza Strip.

According to Hamas negotiator Sami Abu Zuhri, Israel refuses to end its onslaught on Gaza, ensure delivery of humanitarian aid and the return of the displaced Palestinians. Another official who was involved in negotiations in Egypt's capital, Cairo, said: "We are awaiting the final official response from the enemy (Israel)."

"The initial responses do not meet the minimum requirements related to the permanent cessation of hostilities," the official said. "We will not compromise on that which ensures the safety of our people."

Hamas insists on a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the return of the displaced and the entry of humanitarian aid and the beginning of reconstruction in the besieged territory.

Another Hamas official, Mahmoud Mardawi, said the fate of negotiations now rests upon the United States, Israel's great benefactor. "It is now in Washington's hands whether it wants to pressure Netanyahu and his regime to reach an agreement," Mardawi said. "If Israel is serious and does not procrastinate, it is possible to reach a ceasefire before the start of Ramadan."

Hamas spokesman Jihad Taha said Israel "refuses to commit to and give guarantees regarding the ceasefire, the return of the displaced, and withdrawal from the areas of its incursion." The Hamas delegation has left Cairo without achieving a breakthrough in negotiations. Hamas says the talks are set to resume next week.

"Hamas's delegation left Cairo this morning for consultation with the leadership of the movement," a Hamas statement says. Envoys from the U.S., Qatar and Hamas were involved in the ceasefire talks.

More than five months into Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza, the regime's incessant airstrikes and shelling keep claiming innocent lives in the besieged territory. The Gaza Health Ministry says over 80 people have been killed and 140 others injured since Wednesday. In the north of Gaza City, Israel conducted a deadly airstrike on a mosque in the Jabalia refugee camp.

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