

Gaza ceasefire talks breakdown as Hamas delegation leaves Cairo

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Cairo, May 5 (RHC)-- Negotiations over a potential ceasefire in the Gaza war have broken down for now as Hamas reiterated its demand for an end to Israel's assault on the Palestinian territory in exchange for the release of captives and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu flatly ruled out such an outcome.

On Sunday, the two sides blamed each other for the impasse. In their second day of talks with Egyptian and Qatari mediators, Hamas negotiators maintained their stance that any ceasefire agreement must include an end to the war, Palestinian officials said.

Israeli officials did not travel to Cairo to take part in indirect diplomacy, but on Sunday, Netanyahu reiterated Israel's aim since the start of the war nearly seven months ago: to disarm and dismantle Hamas.

Netanyahu said Israel was willing to pause fighting in Gaza in order to secure the release of hostages still being held by Hamas, believed to number more than 100.

In a statement released shortly after Netanyahu's, Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh blamed Netanyahu for "the continuation of the aggression and the expansion of the circle of conflict, and sabotaging the efforts made through the mediators and various parties".

A Hamas delegation at the Gaza truce negotiations in Cairo had departed and will return for more talks on Tuesday, Egyptian state-linked media said.

"The Hamas delegation has left Cairo this evening [Sunday] for Doha in order to conduct consultations, and will return Tuesday to conclude the negotiations" towards a truce in the war with Israel, said Al-Qahera News, a site linked to Egyptian intelligence services, citing an unidentified "informed source".

Reporting from Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, Al Jazeera's Bernard Smith said that Israel has been insisting that any agreement would only include a pause in fighting rather than a permanent end to hostilities.

"From the Israelis, there's an insistence that the most Hamas is going to get is this initial 40-day truce in exchange for 33 Israeli captives and the release of a large number of Palestinian prisoners," he said.

"From Hamas, there's an insistence that any agreement with Israel should lead to an end to the war and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza," Smith added.

Meanwhile, CIA Director William Burns – who had been in Cairo – is also travelling to Doha to hold an emergency meeting with Qatar's prime minister, an official briefed on the talks said late on Sunday.

"Burns is on his way to Doha for an emergency meeting with the Qatari prime minister aimed at exerting maximum pressure on Israel and Hamas to continue negotiating," a source told Reuters.

Washington has pressed Hamas to accept the latest Israeli proposal.

The talks come amid signs that Israel is preparing for an assault on Rafah in southern Gaza, where more than a million displaced Palestinians have taken refuge.

Such an incursion would put hundreds of thousands of lives at risk and be a huge blow to the aid operations of the entire enclave, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said on Friday.

Residents and health officials in Gaza said Israeli planes and tanks continued to pound areas across the Palestinian enclave overnight, killing and wounding several people.

Hamas's armed wing claimed responsibility for an attack on Sunday near the Karem Abu Salem crossing between Israel and Gaza, the main entry point for humanitarian aid access into Gaza. Israel's military said the crossing – known to Israelis as Kerem Shalom – was closed in the wake of the rocket attack.

At least 34,683 people, mostly women and children, have been killed and 78,018 wounded in Israel's war on Gaza since October, according to Palestinian authorities.

Israel launched the assault after Hamas led an attack on southern Israel on October 7, killing at least 1,139 people, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on Israeli statistics.

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