

Over 70 killed in Israeli strikes on al-Mawasi safe zone in south Gaza

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Rafah, July 13 (RHC)-- More than 70 Palestinians have been killed and hundreds are wounded in Israeli military strikes on al-Mawasi, located west of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.

Gaza's Ministry of Health on Saturday put the death toll at 71 people and said 289 others were injured, including some critically wounded.

The attack by Israeli warplanes targeted tents housing displaced Palestinians and a water distillation unit in an area that a Gaza civil defence spokesperson told Al Jazeera was designated a "safe zone" by the Israeli military.

Images from the scene showed Palestinians trying to rescue people from under the rubble, with children and paramedics among the wounded. Reporting from Deir el-Balah in central Gaza, Al Jazeera's Tareq Abu Azzoum said this was "a new massacre committed by the Israeli military", adding that the area was hit by "five bombs and five missiles."

"The scenes that are coming from the area that was targeted are incredibly bloody and devastating," he said. The victims were taken to the Nasser and Kuwaiti hospitals.

An official at Nasser Hospital told Al Jazeera that medical teams did not have the capacity to receive any more wounded patients, while civil defense teams continued to work at the site of the attack. The Israeli military has not officially commented on the strike, but unconfirmed Israeli media reports citing military officials indicate a senior Hamas official may have been the target.

Reporting from Amman, Jordan, after Israel banned Al Jazeera, Hamdah Salhut said this is a familiar pattern by the Israeli military to justify attacks on safe zones.

"We have seen time and time again attacks on areas where there are displaced Palestinians in the tens of thousands. This is a tactic that is commonly used by Israeli forces, saying civilians are being used as 'human shields' for Hamas figures, using that as justification for killing dozens of civilians."

The al-Mawasi area has been repeatedly targeted by the Israeli military, with a strike in late May killing at least 21 people after hitting tents housing displaced families.

Gaza civil defense said the deputy director of its fire and rescue department was killed in a separate Israeli strike in central Khan Younis, and eight other members were wounded. It said Israeli aircraft bombed the area again as civil defence teams were trying to rescue people from a residential building.

At least 60 bodies were discovered after the Israeli military withdrew from some neighbourhoods in Gaza City in the devastated northern part of the besieged enclave, civil defence teams said on Friday. More than 38,000 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military since the start of the war.

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