

WHO chief says he was metres away from Israeli attack on Yemen airport

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Sanaa, December 27 (RHC)-- A wave of Israeli air attacks hit Yemen's main airport just as the World Health Organization's director-general said he was about to board a flight there, wounding one of the United Nations plane's crew, the WHO chief has said.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a post on X that he was just metres away from the attack on Sanaa airport on Thursday.

"As we were about to board our flight from Sanaa ... the airport came under aerial bombardment. One of our plane's crew members was injured," he said.

“The air traffic control tower, the departure lounge – just a few metres from where we were – and the runway were damaged,” he said, adding that he and his colleagues were safe.

There was no immediate comment from Israel on the incident.

The Houthi-controlled Saba news agency said that three people were killed in the strikes on the airport and another three were killed after Israel hit the key port city of Hodeidah, while 40 others were wounded in Israeli attacks.

The Israeli military said it attacked infrastructure used by Yemen’s Houthis at the international airport in the capital, Sanaa, as well as power stations and ports, alleging they were used to smuggle in Iranian weapons and for the entry of senior Iranian officials.

Houthis have repeatedly fired drones and missiles towards Israel in what they describe as acts of solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Al Jazeera’s Gabriel Elizondo, reporting from UN headquarters in New York, said Ghebreyesus and his staff were evacuated out to safety shortly after the attack on the airport. “The UN tells us all of their staff are accounted for. But make no mistake about it, this was a very close call,” Elizondo said.

UN spokesperson Stephanie Tremblay told reporters that the delegation had just concluded discussions on the humanitarian situation in Yemen and were negotiating the release of detained UN staff members.

“The secretary-general emphasises that international law, including humanitarian law as applicable, must be respected at all times, and he appeals to all to respect and protect civilians and civilian infrastructure,” she said.

“Humanitarian relief personnel also must not be targeted and must be respected and protected at all times.”

On Thursday, the Houthis said they were ready to respond quickly to the attack and meet “escalation with escalation”, Houthi-run Al Masirah TV reported.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in an interview with Channel 14 that Israel was only beginning its campaign against the Houthis. “We are just getting started with them,” he said.

The prime minister has been strengthened at home by the Israeli military’s campaign against Iran-backed Hezbollah forces in southern Lebanon and by its destruction of most of the Syrian army’s strategic weapons.

Raiman al-Hamdani, a Yemeni researcher at the ARK international development group, said attacks by Israel on the airport marked a significant escalation.

Al-Hamdani also said the Houthis were playing with fire in “doubling-down” on their pledge to continue attacks on Israel and the country did not have the capacity to deal with the crisis of a major conflict involving Israel.

“I think there is no going back from what we’ve seen today because the Houthis are quite determined to continue striking Israel,” he said.

Last week, Israeli jets bombed Sanaa and Hodeidah, killing nine people. The United States military also has targeted the Houthis in Yemen in recent days.

Israel’s latest wave of strikes in Yemen follows several days of Houthi launches setting off air raid sirens in Israel. The Houthis have also been targeting shipping in the Red Sea corridor, saying it is in support of

Palestinians in Gaza.

Israel's war in Gaza has killed more than 45,000 Palestinians, more than half of them children and women, according to Gaza's Ministry of Health.

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