

Hamas suspends release of Israeli captives over ceasefire violations

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Gaza City, February 11 (RHC)-- Hamas will delay the release of more Israeli captives planned for Saturday "until further notice", due to Israeli violations of the ceasefire in Gaza, the Palestinian group has announced.

Abu Obeida, the spokesperson of Hamas's armed wing – the Qassam Brigades, said in a statement on Monday that the captives will "remain in place until the occupying entity complies with past obligations and compensates retroactively".

Israel and Hamas are in the middle of a six-week ceasefire during which Hamas is releasing dozens of the captives taken during its October 7, 2023, attack in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Abu Obeida said Israel had violated multiple parts of the truce brokered between the two sides. "Over the past three weeks, the resistance leadership monitored the enemy's violations and their non-compliance with the terms of the agreement," he said.

"These violations include delaying the return of displaced persons to northern Gaza, targeting them with shelling and gunfire in various areas of the Gaza Strip, and failing to allow the entry of relief materials in all forms as agreed upon. Meanwhile, the resistance has fulfilled all its obligations."

The Qassam Brigades spokesperson reaffirmed the group's "commitment to the terms of the agreement as long as the occupation adheres to them".

Israel's Defense Minister Israel Katz swiftly responded to the Hamas move, claiming that the decision was in "complete violation of the ceasefire agreement." "I have instructed [the military] to prepare at the highest level of alert for any possible scenario in Gaza," Katz said.

The two sides have carried out five swaps since the truce went into effect last month, freeing 21 Israelis and more than 730 Palestinians. The next exchange was scheduled for Saturday, releasing three Israeli captives in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

Several Palestinian civilians have been shot and killed by Israeli forces as they returned to their homes.

Meanwhile, the number of wounded Palestinian patients who were evacuated out of the Strip, as well as the humanitarian aid trucks that have entered Gaza, were fewer than what had been promised in the ceasefire agreement.

The Qassam Brigades announcement also comes in light of the latest statements made by U.S. President Donald Trump, who has raised concerns about the sustainability of the ceasefire deal. Trump has repeatedly called for ethnically cleansing Gaza, saying that the United States would take "ownership" of the territory.

The first stage of the deal expires on March 1. The second phase, which would see the release of all captives and a permanent ceasefire, has not been finalized. The third part of the agreement is supposed to usher in a multiyear plan to reconstruct the territory.

Palestinian activist and politician Mustafa Barghouti said Israel has violated the agreement in three ways: obstructing temporary housing and humanitarian aid, shooting at people in Gaza and backing Trump's plan to ethnically cleanse Gaza.

"More than that, now Netanyahu is threatening to go back to the war, and he's declaring that he will never stop the war," Barghouti told Al Jazeera.

“So what do they want – to get back all Israeli prisoners and then continue the massacres in Gaza? This is exactly the message that Palestinians were getting.”

Netanyahu reiterated last week that he is committed to fulfilling the aims of the war, including destroying Hamas’s military and governing capabilities.

Before Abu Obeida’s statement on Monday, Senior Hamas official Basem Naim told Al Jazeera that Israel has not been fulfilling its obligations under the agreement.

“In the last three weeks after signing the deal we have been in very serious talks and negotiations with the mediators — the Egyptians, the Qataris, and the United States — about the daily violations by the Israelis of the deal,” Naim said.

He noted 25 Palestinians had been killed and dozens wounded by Israeli forces after the ceasefire went into effect.

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