

Hamas releases six Israeli captives, affirms readiness for next phase of swap deal

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Ramallah, February 22 (RHC)-- The Palestinian Hamas resistance movement has handed over six Israeli captives in the seventh round of exchanging prisoners with the occupying regime as part of the recent ceasefire agreement.

The Gaza-based movement submitted the six Israeli prisoners to the International Red Cross in the southern city of Rafah on Saturday, in the seventh batch of the first phase of the ceasefire deal clinched in mid-January.

The first handover, including two Israeli prisoners, took place in Rafah, where Hamas raised a banner in the exchange site that read, "We are the flood, we are the extreme strength."

Palestinian Ma'an News Agency reported that the exchanges had been arranged by the al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, in two locations, with the first in Rafah and the second in the Nuseirat refugee camp, central Gaza Strip.

The two Israeli captives, Tal Shoham and Avra Mengistu, were handed over to a team from the International Red Cross in Rafah.

Hamas had earlier confirmed that it would release the six Israeli captives, Elia Maimon Yitzhak Cohen, Omer Shem Tov, Omer Finkert, Tal Shoham, Avera Mengistu, and Hisham al-Sayed, in exchange for 602 Palestinian prisoners and abductees.

The Israeli regime's officials announced on Saturday the names of the Palestinian prisoners scheduled to be released under the new round of exchange deal.

The Media Office of Hamas said 50 Palestinian prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment, 60 prisoners with long sentences, and 47 detainees who had been arrested by the regime would be released. The office pointed out that 445 prisoners from the Gaza Strip who had been abducted after October 7, 2023 will also be released.

Captives to return 'in coffins' or through negotiations: Hamas

In a statement on Saturday, Hamas underlined the resistance movement's readiness for the next phase of swap deal and said the completion of exchange operation for six captives once again confirmed Hamas' commitment to the agreement while the regime of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to stall in implementing its terms.

"The massive public presence during today's handover of six enemy captives sends a renewed message to the enemy and its supporters—that the bond between our people and its resistance is deeply rooted and unwavering," the statement said.

"It has now become clear to the Zionist public that they have two choices: either they receive their captives in coffins, as happened on Thursday due to Netanyahu's arrogance, or they welcome them alive by adhering to the resistance's conditions."

Hamas affirmed the resistance movement's readiness proceed with the second phase of the agreement, saying, "We are prepared to finalize a comprehensive exchange deal that ensures a permanent ceasefire and a complete withdrawal of the occupation."

The Gaza-based movement warned against the occupation's attempts to evade the agreement and underlined, "The only path for captives to return to their families is through negotiations and sincere commitment to the terms of the deal."

Hamas added that the Palestinian people and their brave resistance, led by al-Qassam Brigades, will continue the path of resistance and struggle, defending their land and sanctities until liberation of occupied lands, return of Palestinians to their homeland and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with the occupied al-Quds as its capital.

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