

Israel fires on Palestinians waiting for humanitarian aid, killing or injuring 170

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The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) fired on a crowd of thousands of Palestinians waiting for humanitarian aid in Gaza City, which has been cut off from aid deliveries for many weeks. The attack came as Gaza's Health Ministry reported over 200 deaths in Israeli attacks on civilians over a 24-hour period from Wednesday to Thursday.

The attack occurred at the Kuwait Roundabout; 20 people were killed and 150 injured. Israeli tanks shelled the crowd and fired live ammunition. The authorities reported that the death toll is expected to rise sharply, as many of the injuries are severe. Survivors are being treated at al-Shifa Hospital, which is out of medical supplies and only has a skeleton staff. In November, IDF soldiers bombarded and raided the hospital, which was Gaza's largest prior to Israel's genocidal onslaught.

Further south, in Khan Younis, Israel intensified its indiscriminate attacks on civilians and infrastructure. After issuing a cynical evacuation order Wednesday to around half a million people with nowhere to go, the IDF continued shelling residential areas on Thursday. Israeli forces also surrounded and blockaded the two remaining hospitals in the city, al-Nasser and al-Amal.

Al-Nasser Hospital has run out of food, anaesthetics, and painkillers. The UN human rights agency OCHA reported that "no one can enter or exit" Nasser Hospital, including 400 dialysis patients. Late Thursday, the Gaza Health Ministry reported that tanks were consistently shelling the surrounding area and drones were firing missiles towards the medical center, indicating advanced preparations for an al-Shifa-style raid.

"The situation in Khan Younis underscores a consistent failure to uphold the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law: distinction,

proportionality and precautions in carrying out attacks," said United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) head Thomas White. "This is unacceptable and abhorrent and must stop."

The death toll following an Israeli attack on a UN shelter in the city Wednesday rose to 13. This center hosts tens of thousands of displaced civilians, and came under shell and small arms fire from Israeli forces. A further 75 people were injured in the attack, 15 of them critically.

Underscoring the humanitarian catastrophe produced by Israel's imperialist-backed genocide, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stated Thursday that less than 20 percent of Gaza's territory, or 60 square kilometres, is providing refuge to 1.5 million people, about two-thirds of Gaza's population. The organisation noted that "the dramatic escalation of fighting threatens their survival."

In a separate statement, the head of the ICRC's office in Gaza, William Schomburg, warned that the medical system in the enclave risks total collapse. "Every functioning hospital in the Gaza Strip is overcrowded and short on medical supplies, fuel, food and water," he said. "Many are housing thousands of displaced families. And now two more facilities risk being lost due to the fighting."

This humanitarian catastrophe is the intended outcome of Israel's genocide against the Palestinians. Numerous officials from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government have explicitly declared their intention to ethnically cleanse Gaza by driving its residents into neighboring Egypt's Sinai Desert. Israel has deliberately starved Gaza of aid since its onslaught began, resulting in widespread hunger and epidemics.

A report from the Palestinian Environment Quality Authority stated Thursday that a horrifying two-thirds of Gaza residents suffer from water-borne diseases.

A major component of Israel's ethnic cleansing operation is the creation of a 1-kilometre buffer zone along the Palestinian side of the Gaza-Israel border. According to a Hebrew University study, 40 percent of the 2,824 buildings in this area have been razed to the ground since 7 October. Around 67 percent of the buildings within 1 kilometre of the Israeli border in the Khan Younis area, where the population is most dense, have been destroyed. One soldier told the *Wall Street Journal*, "It was mostly agriculture. Now it's a military zone, a complete no man's land."

Washington has hypocritically criticised the creation of the buffer zone, but the Biden administration continues to supply the weaponry Israel is using to create it and to massacre hundreds of Palestinians every day.

A *Times of Israel* report Thursday noted that more than 250 cargo planes and 20 ships have delivered over 10,000 tons of munitions and military equipment to Israel since its onslaught on Gaza began. The article stated that Defence Ministry Director General Eyal Zamir visited Washington this week to finalize the purchase of 25 F-35 stealth fighter jets, 25 F-15 fighter jets and 12 Apache helicopters from the US. Zamir also discussed ensuring a steady supply of munitions to Israel during the ongoing genocide.

The Biden administration has also consistently defended Israel against all international criticism. The International Court of Justice is due to issue an interim ruling Friday on South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza. The devastating indictment presented to the court earlier this month could produce a ruling calling for an immediate ceasefire. However, Washington has already indicated that it would back Israel if it flouts any such requirement to continue its genocidal onslaught.

Asked whether the US would urge Israel to abide by the ICJ ruling Thursday, State Department spokesman Vedant Patel responded: "This is a legal process, and I'm not going to hypothesise or speculate on any kind of outcome." Asked directly if the US would urge Israel to follow the example of Hamas, which declared earlier in the day that it would abide by an ICJ ruling in favour of a ceasefire, Patel responded by denouncing

Hamas.

The unrestrained support extended by Washington and its European imperialist allies to Israel's genocide is inseparable from their plans to escalate the regional war already underway across the Middle East.

In the two weeks since US and British forces began striking Houthi positions in Yemen, military tensions have risen sharply. A second French warship arrived in the region this week as the European Union prepares a military operation led by German and French imperialism. US warplanes carried out another strike on Yemen Monday, hitting targets Washington claimed to be underground storage sites and missile launching facilities.

The Houthis have vowed to continue attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea bound for Israel until humanitarian aid reaches Gaza.

US imperialism's reckless escalation of military conflict throughout the Middle East is aimed at consolidating its regional hegemony against China and Russia. Washington views this war as one front in a rapidly intensifying third world war, which includes fronts against Russia in Ukraine and China in the Indo-Pacific. It is setting the Middle East ablaze, as shown by the exchange of strikes between Iran and Pakistan, missile strikes by Iran and Turkey against Kurdish positions in Iraq, and Israel's ongoing bombardment of Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon.

The situation on the Israel-Lebanon border increasingly resembles a low-intensity war. The IDF reports strikes on numerous alleged Hezbollah targets on a daily basis, boasting that it has struck over 1,200 since 7 October. Thursday's strikes hit an air strip, reconnaissance posts and other infrastructure allegedly used by Hezbollah in Lebanese villages along the border.



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