

UNRWA headquarters “flattened” as destruction of Gaza continues

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The massacres of Palestinian civilians by Israel over the weekend continued Monday.

Artillery, drone and airstrikes were launched against the Nuseirat, al-Bureij and al-Maghazi refugee camps, the cities of Deir al-Balah in central Gaza and Rafah in the south, and Gaza City in the north.

Two people were injured at a power station near Nuseirat, a day after the Abu Araban school in the camp was targeted—the fifth Israeli strike on a school-shelter in eight days—killing 15 people and wounding dozens. The Gaza health ministry announced Monday that the death toll had increased to 22. Thousands of displaced Palestinians had been housed in the complex.

Shelling in al-Bureij landed in a schoolyard, of Abu Helu School, injuring one person.

The Abu Araban massacre followed the slaughter of 92 people at al-Mawasi, a supposed “safe zone”, on Saturday. Thirty-year-old Aya Mohammad, a survivor of the attack, described Monday how “the ground shook underneath my feet and the dust and sand rose to the sky and I saw dismembered bodies,” adding, “Where to go is what everybody asks, and no one has the answer.”

Multiple homes were destroyed in Rafah, with the Israel Defense Forces launching missiles from helicopters. Ten dead bodies were pulled out of the wreckage. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are sheltering in the city.

Flaunting its genocidal intentions, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) levelled the Gaza headquarters of the United Nations Palestinian relief agency UNRWA. Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini posted images of the destruction with the comment, “UNRWA headquarters in Gaza, turned into a battlefield & now flattened. Another episode in the blatant disregard of international humanitarian law.”

This followed a fresh round of unsubstantiated allegations by Israel that the agency is harbouring hundreds of Hamas agents. Earlier accusations were the pretext for the imperialist powers to cut all funding to the organisation responsible for feeding, educating and providing healthcare to 5.9 million Palestinians across the Middle East.

UNRWA’s head of external relations Tamara al-Rifai told *Al Jazeera* the images were “shocking” and noted that 190 UNRWA facilities, “most of which served as shelters for displaced people”, had now been attacked, with 500 killed in these facilities protected by international law, and 1,600 wounded.

Another four Gazans were killed in a strike that destroyed a house on as-Salam Street in Deir al-Balah, five in al-Maghazi, and three on al-Mansoura Street in Gaza City’s Shujayea neighbourhood, reduced to ruins by a continuous Israel Defense Forces assault in the last two weeks.

Describing the attack in Deir al-Balah, Walid Thabet said, “My mother, an elderly woman, was sitting with me upstairs. She went downstairs and after five minutes I pulled her out from under the rubble. We also pulled my sister out and my sister’s children too.

“Those who died are my mother, my sister, and my sister’s children. Children! One was two and a half years old, and the other two.”

Al Jazeera’s Tareq Abu Azzoum reported an “intensification of bombardment” in the city, leaving behind “a trail of destruction, causing a great deal of panic and frustration among the residents of neighbouring houses. Deir al-Balah is where Palestinians have been told to go and seek refuge.”

The local municipality has warned it is no longer able to provide 700,000 people in the area with drinking water after running out of fuel.

Gaza’s water supply across the enclave, restricted by Israel’s siege even before the war, has been devastated. According to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 67 percent of the strip’s water and sanitation system had been destroyed as of last month.

New and expectant mothers are especially affected. The UN reports that 95 percent do not have enough to eat, with miscarriages already three times more likely than before the war in February, according to the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and the Johns Hopkins Center for Humanitarian Health.

More than 13,000 women will give birth in Gaza in the next month and will have to rely on the three of the strip's 13 remaining hospitals (23 no longer function) providing any pregnancy care at all.

Madeleine McGivern of Care UK told the *Guardian*:

Women are giving birth without any pain relief whatsoever, living in fear, not being able to access any doctor or antenatal care, not knowing whether they'll give birth in a boiling hot tent or, if they are able to go to a hospital, risk being hit by a bomb or shot by a sniper on the way there or the way back.

Compounding the food and water crisis is the pollution caused by mountains of solid waste piling up amid the evisceration of Gazan society—330,000 tons across the whole territory, often within feet of refugee tent cities. Many Palestinians are forced to scavenge these sites for anything useful or saleable.

Speaking to the BBC, Dr Ahmed al-Fari, head of the children's departments at Nasser Hospital, commented:

It is no secret that the biggest cause of intestinal infections currently occurring in the Gaza Strip is the contamination of the water supplied to these children.

Piles of waste join mountains of earth and debris. According to a UN assessment, the near 140,000 destroyed buildings in Gaza (65 percent of them residential) have produced roughly 40 million tons of rubble, more than 15 years' work for a fleet of 100 lorries to clear.

"The actual topography has changed," one UN official told the *Guardian* last week. "There are hills where there were none. The 2,000lb bombs dropped [by Israel] are actually altering the landscape."

The United States has sent 14,000 of these 2,000lb bombs to Israel since October.

Roughly 10 percent of weapons dropped on Gaza fail to detonate on impact, according to Pehr Lodhammar, a former UN Mine Action Service chief for Iraq, leading, says Gaza's Civil Defence agency, to "more than 10 explosions every week" of unexploded ordnance.

Amid the latest killings, it was the turn of David Lammy, foreign secretary in Britain's new Labour Party government, to tour Israel and sprinkle perfumed phrases about "peace" and "stability" on its fascist regime and genocidal war.

Arriving in Israel Sunday, he waded through the blood to shake the hand of murderer-in-chief Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and say, "I'm here to push for a ceasefire. The loss of life over the last few months... is horrendous. It has to stop."

A few more massacres later, he told the media ahead of a meeting with Netanyahu's partner in crime, President Isaac Herzog, on Monday, "It's important that, whilst we are in a war, that war is conducted according to international humanitarian law."

Herzog told the press conference after the meeting:

The foreign secretary made clear that his country will continue to work and demand for the release of all the hostages ... The bonds between the British and Israeli peoples are as strong and robust as they are historic and impactful—especially now, in facing the challenges ahead of us.

Lammy told reporters an "assessment" into arms sales to Israel had "begun."

To underscore the cynical character of such a pose, the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* reported that Lammy had given assurances that the UK would not withdraw its objections to the International Criminal Court's application for arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant.

The objections to the arrest warrants for crimes against humanity and war crimes was first raised by the former Conservative government of Rishi Sunak, but at the time Lammy said Labour would drop the legal challenge. The US was reported as lobbying Labour to reverse this position, with all too predictable success.



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