

Gaza death toll tops 65,000 as hundreds of thousands flee south

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The death toll in the nearly two-year-long genocide in Gaza has reached 65,000, Gaza's health ministry said Friday. This latest horrific milestone comes as Israeli forces continue their assault on Gaza City, the last remaining part of Gaza outside direct military occupation, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee south over the choked coastal road.

Israeli military spokesperson Avichay Adraee said Friday that the Israeli military would use "unprecedented force" in its assault on Gaza City, urging the remaining residents to "join the hundreds of thousands" of people fleeing south.

"This current military operation is completely destroying entire blocks, and there are still families who are trapped under the debris of targeted houses, particularly in the Tal al-Hawa neighborhood," reported *Al Jazeera* journalist Abu Azzoum.

Over 350,000 people have fled Gaza City since August, the Israeli military reported. Before Israel began its onslaught on Gaza City, over one million people were sheltering there. Hundreds of thousands of people remain in the city because they lack the means to evacuate or are too ill, hungry, or injured to do so.

Israeli troops have repeatedly attacked Palestinians fleeing on the coastal road, *Al Jazeera* reported, despite it being labeled a "safe zone."

Nivin Ahmed, 50, told the AFP news agency that her family fled on foot to the south. "We walked more than 15 km, we were crawling from exhaustion." She added, "My youngest son cried from fatigue. We took turns dragging a small cart with some of our belongings."

Israeli forces killed 43 people in Gaza on Friday, including 26 in Gaza City, Reuters reported.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government has called the onslaught on Gaza City part of the "concluding moves" in the war on Gaza launched in October 2023. Israeli officials have made it clear that they

are planning the total displacement of the Palestinian population to the country's south, from whence large numbers of them will be expelled to other countries.

In May, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich explained that "Within a year... Gaza will be entirely destroyed, civilians will be sent to... the south to a humanitarian zone... and from there they will start to leave in great numbers to third countries."

The Trump administration is actively discussing plans to jointly occupy Gaza alongside Israel. The devastated enclave will be transformed, in Trump's words, into the "Gaza Riviera," where major corporations and investors will profit from the mass killing and forcible displacement of the population.

Every day, Palestinians in Gaza are dying from hunger, including a nine-year-old child who died from severe malnutrition at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in central Gaza. To date, 441 people have died from malnutrition or starvation since the start of the genocide.

In August, the UN-backed Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) officially declared a famine in Gaza City, stating that "this famine is entirely man-made." The report added that "after 22 months of relentless conflict, over half a million people in the Gaza Strip are facing catastrophic conditions characterized by starvation, destitution, and death."

The situation has since dramatically worsened, with the closure of the Zikim Crossing on September 12. In a statement on Wednesday, the UN humanitarian office (OCHA) warned:

There are grave concerns over fuel and food stock depletion in a matter of days as there are now no direct aid entry points into northern Gaza and resupply from south to north is increasingly challenging due to mounting road congestion and

insecurity.

On Wednesday, the conflict tracking group Acled published figures indicating that fifteen out of every sixteen people killed in Gaza were civilians. The group said that since March 18, 1,110 members of Hamas had been killed out of a total death toll of 16,000.

Another set of internal figures from the Israeli military, reported by *The Guardian*, estimates that civilians accounted for 83 percent of deaths in Gaza since the start of the genocide.

Last week, Herzi Halevi, the former chief of Israel's military, admitted that over 200,000 Palestinians in Gaza, or over 10 percent of the population, have been killed or injured during the Israeli onslaught on Gaza.

The vast majority of Gaza has been destroyed by the Israeli military, with 90 percent of homes either damaged or destroyed. The enclave's medical, sanitation, and food distribution infrastructure has been largely destroyed.

On Thursday, the US vetoed a resolution in the United Nations Security Council calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to Israel's restrictions on the entry of food into the enclave.

The intensified onslaught on Gaza City follows the trip by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio to Israel. During his trip, Rubio referred to the Palestinians as "barbaric animals," echoing the genocidal rhetoric of former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who said in October 2023 that the Palestinians were "human animals."

On Friday, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the Trump administration is moving ahead with a plan to sell nearly \$6 billion in weapons to Israel, to be paid for with US tax dollars.

The planned sale includes \$3.8 billion for 30 Apache attack helicopters, which would double Israel's current stock of the aircraft, as well as another 3,200 infantry assault vehicles, at a cost of \$1.9 billion.



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