

UN chief says Israel, Gaza fighting 'utterly appalling'

Sun, 2021-05-16 17:16

NEW YORK: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the UN Security Council on Sunday that hostilities in Israel and Gaza were "utterly appalling" and called for an immediate end to fighting.

Opening the 15-member council's first public meeting on the conflict, Guterres said the United Nations is "actively engaging all sides toward an immediate cease-fire" and called on them "to allow mediation efforts to intensify and succeed."

The death toll in Gaza jumped to 181 overnight, including 47 children, amid an intensive Israeli air and artillery barrage since the fighting erupted last Monday. Ten people have been killed in Israel, including two children, in thousands of rocket attacks by Hamas and other militant groups.

"Each time Israel hears a foreign leader speak of its right to defend itself it is further emboldened to continue murdering entire families in their sleep," Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Malki told the Security Council.

Israel's UN Ambassador Gilad Erdan said Israel's response to indiscriminate attacks by Hamas strictly adhered to international law and that the country was taking "unparalleled steps to prevent civilian casualties."

"Israel uses its missiles to protect its children. Hamas uses children to protect its missiles," Erdan said.

The UN Security Council met privately twice last week over the worsening violence, but has so far been unable to agree on a public statement because the United States – a strong ally of Israel – did not believe it would be helpful, diplomats said.

"We call upon the US to shoulder its responsibilities, take a just position, and together with most of the international community support the Security Council in easing the situation," said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who chaired Sunday's meeting as China is council president for May.

UN Middle East envoy Tor Wennesland urged the international community to "take action now to enable the parties to step back from the brink."

Truce efforts by Egypt, Qatar and the United Nations have so far offered no sign of progress. The United States sent an envoy to the region and President Joe Biden spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Saturday.

"Concessions must be made as a price to be paid for peace so as to spare people from paying the heavy price of war," Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry told the Security Council.



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Israel kills 42 in Gaza as Netanyahu warns war will go on Egypt sends ambulances to pick up wounded from Gaza

[Israel kills 42 in Gaza as Netanyahu warns war will go on](#)

Author:

By FARES AKRAM and JOSEPH KRAUSS | AP

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Sun, 2021-05-16 08:45

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip: Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City flattened three buildings and killed at least 42 people Sunday, Palestinian medics said. Despite the heavy death toll and international efforts to broker a cease-fire, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signaled the fourth war with Gaza's Hamas rulers would rage on.

In a televised address, Netanyahu said Sunday evening the attacks were continuing at "full-force" and will "take time." Israel "wants to levy a heavy price" from the Hamas militant group, he said, flanked by his defense minister and political rival, Benny Gantz, in a show of unity.

The Israeli air assault early Sunday was the deadliest single attack since heavy fighting broke out between Israel and Hamas nearly a week ago, marking the worst fighting here since their devastating 2014 war in Gaza.

The airstrikes hit a major downtown street of residential buildings and storefronts over the course of five minutes after midnight, destroying two adjacent buildings and one about 50 yards (meters) down the road.

At one point, a rescuer shouted, "Can you hear me?" into a hole in the rubble. "Are you OK?" Minutes later, first responders pulled a survivor out and carried him off on an orange stretcher. The Gaza Health Ministry said 16 women and 10 children were among those killed, with more than 50 people wounded, and rescue efforts are still underway.

Earlier, the Israeli military said it destroyed the home of Gaza's top Hamas leader, Yahiyeh Sinwar, in a separate strike in the southern town of Khan Younis. It was the third such attack in the last two days on the homes of senior Hamas leaders, who have gone underground.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Israel appears to have stepped up strikes in recent days to inflict as much damage as possible on Hamas as international mediators work to end the fighting and stave off an Israeli ground invasion in Gaza. But targeting the group's leaders could hinder those efforts. A US diplomat is in the region to try to de-escalate tensions, and the UN Security Council is meeting Sunday. In its airstrikes, Israel has leveled a number of Gaza City's tallest office and residential buildings, alleging they contain Hamas military infrastructure. Among them was the building housing The Associated Press office and those of other media outlets.

The latest outbreak of violence began in east Jerusalem last month, when Palestinian protests and clashes with police broke out in response to Israeli police tactics during Ramadan and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers. A focal point of clashes was the Al-Aqsa Mosque, a frequent flashpoint that is located on a hilltop compound that is revered by both Muslims and Jews.

Hamas fired rockets toward Jerusalem late Monday, triggering the Israeli assault on impoverished Gaza, which is home to more than 2 million Palestinians and has been under an Israeli and Egyptian blockade since Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007.

At least 188 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, including 55 children and 33 women, with 1,230 people wounded. Eight people in Israel have been killed, including a 5-year-old boy and a soldier.

Speaking alongside Netanyahu on Sunday, Israel's military chief, Lt. Gen. Aviv Kohavi, said Hamas did not anticipate Israel's overwhelming response to its rocket fire. "Hamas made a serious and grave mistake and didn't read us properly."

The turmoil has also spilled over elsewhere, fueling protests in the occupied West Bank and stoking violence within Israel between its Jewish and Arab citizens, with clashes and vigilante attacks on people and property.

On Sunday, a driver rammed into an Israeli checkpoint in the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah – where the Palestinian families had been threatened with eviction – injuring six officers before police shot and killed the attacker, Israeli police said.

The violence also sparked pro-Palestinian protests in cities across Europe and the United States, with French police firing tear gas and water cannons at demonstrators in Paris.

The military said Sunday it struck Sinwar's home and that of his brother Muhammad, another senior Hamas member. On Saturday it destroyed the home of Khalil al-Hayeh, a senior figure in Hamas' political branch.

Hamas' upper echelon has gone into hiding in Gaza, and it is unlikely any were at home at the time of the strikes. Hamas' top leader, Ismail Haniyeh, divides his time between Turkey and Qatar, both of which provide political support to the group.

Hamas and the Islamic Jihad militant group have acknowledged 20 fighters killed since the fighting broke out Monday. Israel says the real number is far higher and has released the names and photos of two dozen alleged operatives it says were "eliminated."

An Egyptian diplomat said Israel's targeting of Hamas political leaders would complicate cease-fire efforts. The diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door negotiations, said Cairo is working to broker an end to the fighting, as are other international actors.

The Egyptian diplomat said the destruction of Hamas' rocket capabilities would require a ground invasion that would "inflame the whole region." Egypt, which made peace with Israel decades ago, has threatened to "suspend" cooperation in various fields, the official said, without elaborating.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration has affirmed its support for Israel while working to de-escalate the crisis. American diplomat Hady Amr met with Gantz, the Israeli defense minister, who thanked the US for its support. Gantz said Israel "takes every precaution to strike at military targets only and avoid harming civilians, while its civilians are the targets of indiscriminate attack."

Hamas and other militant groups have fired some 2,900 rockets into Israel. The military said 450 of the rockets had fallen short or misfired, while Israeli air defenses intercepted 1,150.

The interception rate appeared to have significantly dropped since the start of the conflict, when Israel said 90% were intercepted. The military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Israel has meanwhile carried out hundreds of airstrikes across Gaza.

On Saturday, Israel bombed the 12-story al-Jalaa Building, which housed the offices of The Associated Press, the TV network Al-Jazeera and other media

outlets, along with several floors of apartments.

Netanyahu alleged that Hamas military intelligence was operating inside the building. Such reasoning is routinely given for targeting certain locations in airstrikes, including residential buildings. The military also has accused the militant group of using journalists as human shields, but provided no evidence to back up the claims.

The AP has operated from the building for 15 years, including through three previous wars between Israel and Hamas. During those conflicts as well as the current one, the news agency's cameras, operating from its top floor office and roof terrace, offered 24-hour live shots as militants' rockets arched toward Israel and Israeli airstrikes hammered the city and its surroundings. "We have had no indication Hamas was in the building or active in the building," AP President and CEO Gary Pruitt said in a statement. "This is something we actively check to the best of our ability. We would never knowingly put our journalists at risk."

In the afternoon, the military called the building's owner and warned a strike would come within an hour. AP staffers and other occupants evacuated safely. Soon after, three missiles hit the building and destroyed it, bringing it crashing down in a giant cloud of dust.

"The world will know less about what is happening in Gaza because of what happened today," Pruitt said. "We are shocked and horrified."



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Israel strikes house of Hamas political chief in Gaza Strip
Biden speaks to Netanyahu, Abbas after Israel flattens AP news office in Gaza

Biden speaks to Netanyahu, Abbas after Israel flattens AP news office in Gaza

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Sat, 2021-05-15 16:52

DUBAI: President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have spoken about the situation with Gaza.

According to a statement from Netanyahu's office, the Israeli leader updated Biden on the developments and actions that Israel has taken and intends to take. It says Netanyahu also thanked Biden for the "unreserved support of the United States for our right to defend ourselves."

It says Netanyahu emphasized in the conversation that Israel is doing everything to avoid harming the uninvolved. The statement added "the proof of this is that in the towers where there are terrorist targets attacked by the IDF, they are evacuated from the uninvolved."

The Biden-Netanyahu call came just hours after an Israeli airstrike on Saturday targeted and destroyed a high-rise building in Gaza City that housed offices of The Associated Press and other media outlets.

Meanwhile, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas received an "important" phone call on Saturday from Biden, Abbas's spokesman said, the first call between the two leaders since Biden took office in January.

Biden told Abbas the United States "is making efforts with the concerned parties to reach the goal" of reducing violence in the region, a summary of the call published by WAFA said.

He also said the United States opposes the eviction of Palestinians from East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah, the summary said, a case that helped ignite tension in the holy city and spark fighting between Israel and Gaza militants.



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Saudi, Egyptian, Kuwaiti foreign ministers call for immediate ceasefire in Palestinian territories
Egypt sends ambulances to pick up wounded from Gaza

[Morocco to send 40 tons of aid to Palestinians](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Fri, 2021-05-14 22:24

RABAT: Morocco's King Mohammed VI on Friday ordered 40 tons of aid for Palestinians to be shipped to the West Bank and Gaza following recent violence.

The aid includes food, medicine and blankets and will be carried by military aircrafts, the foreign ministry said in a statement. Morocco also denounced “the violent acts perpetrated in occupied Palestinian territories,” and reiterated support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Morocco resumed ties with Israel in December as part of a deal brokered by the United States that also includes Washington’s recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.



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Egypt sends ambulances to pick up wounded from Gaza Israeli military accused of using media to trick Hamas militants in Gaza

Iran's foreign minister cancels Austrian visit over Israeli flag

Author:

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Sat, 2021-05-15 12:21

ZURICH: Iran's foreign minister canceled a visit with his Austrian counterpart to show displeasure that Chancellor Sebastian Kurz's government had flown the Israeli flag in Vienna in a show of solidarity, the Austrian foreign ministry said on Saturday.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was supposed to meet Alexander Schallenberg but had called off the trip, a spokeswoman for Schallenberg said, confirming a report in newspaper Die Presse.

"We regret this and take note of it, but for us it is as clear as day that when Hamas fires more than 2,000 rockets at civilian targets in Israel then we will not remain silent," the spokeswoman said.

Hamas is the Islamist group that runs Gaza. Israel has pummeled Gaza with air strikes and Palestinian militants have launched rocket barrages at Israel in the worst escalation of violence in years.

In Tehran, foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told the semi-official news agency ISNA: "Mr Zarif did not consider the trip beneficial in these circumstances, and therefore the travel arrangements were not finalized."

The dispute comes during talks in Vienna to try to revive a 2015 accord with western powers in which Iran agreed to curb its nuclear program in exchange for relief from sanctions. Former US President Donald Trump abandoned the deal in 2018, prompting Iran to begin violating its terms.

Kurz, who is firmly pro-Israel, had called flying the Israeli flag over the federal chancellery on Friday a mark of solidarity amid the violent clashes. But Abbas Araqchi, who heads the Iranian delegation at the Vienna talks, criticized the move.

"Vienna is the seat of (nuclear watchdog) IAEA & UN, and (Austria) so far been a great host for negotiations," Araqchi wrote on Twitter. "Shocking & painful to see flag of the occupying regime, that brutally killed tens of innocent civilians, inc many children in just few days, over govt offices in Vienna. We stand with Palestine."



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Official: Israel upgrading contingency plans for Iran attack
Israel destroys media building in Gaza as conflict rages on