

Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt): Flash Update #8

Escalation in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Israel

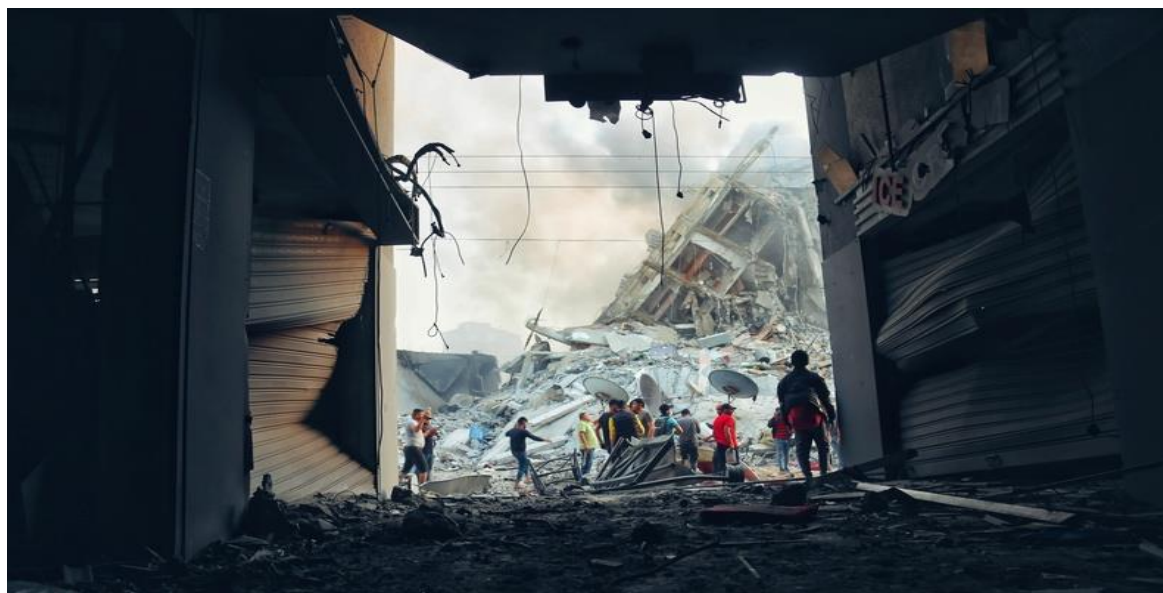
As of 12:00, 18 May 2021

- Hostilities between Israeli forces and armed groups in Gaza continued for the eighth day, again resulting in casualties. In the last 24 hours, in the context of hostilities in Gaza, the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) verified that 13 Palestinians, including two children and one woman, were killed.¹ Out of these, at least three are civilians.
- Hostilities have also resulted in additional displacement of Palestinians, bringing the cumulative number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to 72,000, including 47,000 seeking protection in 58 UNRWA schools across Gaza. Another 25,000 displaced people are staying with host families.
- The Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing point in Gaza was temporarily opened today for the entry of critical humanitarian supplies, for the first time since the beginning of hostilities.
- Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces continued across the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Two Palestinians were killed and 91 Palestinians were injured by Israeli forces.
- During the reporting period, no fatalities were reported in Israel in the context of the hostilities.

Latest developments

(outside of the reporting period)

- The Israeli authorities shut down the Kerem Shalom Crossing shortly after its opening, due to the launching of mortars at the crossing by a Palestinian armed group; only five of the 24 humanitarian trucks scheduled for today entered Gaza.
- Two foreign nationals were killed in an Israeli community next to Gaza after being hit by Palestinian mortar fire.
- According to media sources, a Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israeli forces during clashes at a checkpoint near Ramallah.



Destruction in Gaza following Israeli strike May 2021 © Photo by Mohammad Libed

¹ Includes those that have died during the past 24 hours due to injuries previously sustained.

KEY ASKS

The fighting must stop immediately.

Until a ceasefire is reached, **all parties must agree to a 'humanitarian pause'**, to ensure access into and out of Gaza for humanitarian staff and critical goods. This includes the creation of secure conditions so that the relevant crossings can be opened. Humanitarian Corridors inside Gaza must be agreed and respected to allow safe movement for the delivery of assistance.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Gaza

Casualties

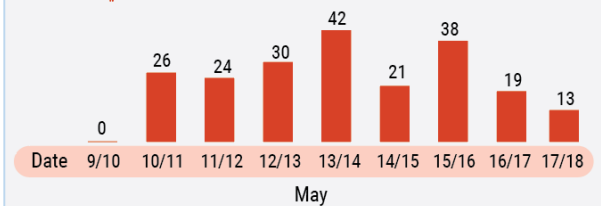
Overnight, Israeli forces carried out strikes from the air, the land and the sea across the Gaza Strip, reportedly targeting armed groups and related infrastructure, especially tunnels, and the residences of armed group members.

On 17 May, the Israeli air force struck Ash Shawwa residential/commercial building in central Gaza city, killing a 45-year-old man, and his 10-year-old niece. Several other people were reportedly injured, while a number of international NGO premises, the office of the Qatari Red Crescent Society as well as a bank housed in the building sustained major damage. In addition, some nearby buildings, including Al Rimal clinic, where the central testing laboratory for COVID-19 is located, were damaged and suspended work as a result.

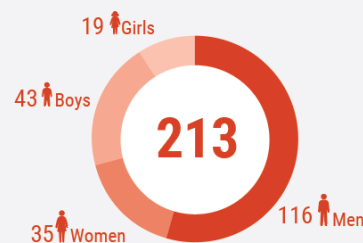
According to OHCHR, given the impact on civilians lives and on essential civilian infrastructure, including humanitarian organizations and medical facilities, the incident raises serious concerns over a possible indiscriminate and disproportionate attack under international humanitarian law (IHL). Since 10 May, OHCHR has verified that 213 Palestinians, including 62 children, 35 women (of whom three pregnant) and 116 men, have been killed in Gaza. The overall number includes two people with disabilities, including one a child. According to OHCHR, at least

GAZA STRIP: PALESTINIAN FATALITIES

FATALITIES IN THE LAST 24 HOURS (12:00 ON 17 MAY AND 12:00 ON 18 MAY)



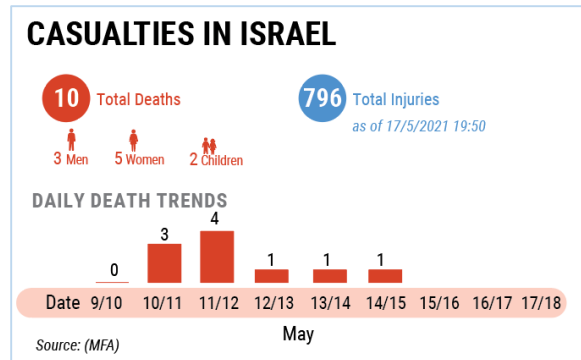
TOTAL FATALITIES SINCE 10 MAY 2021



Source: OHCHR

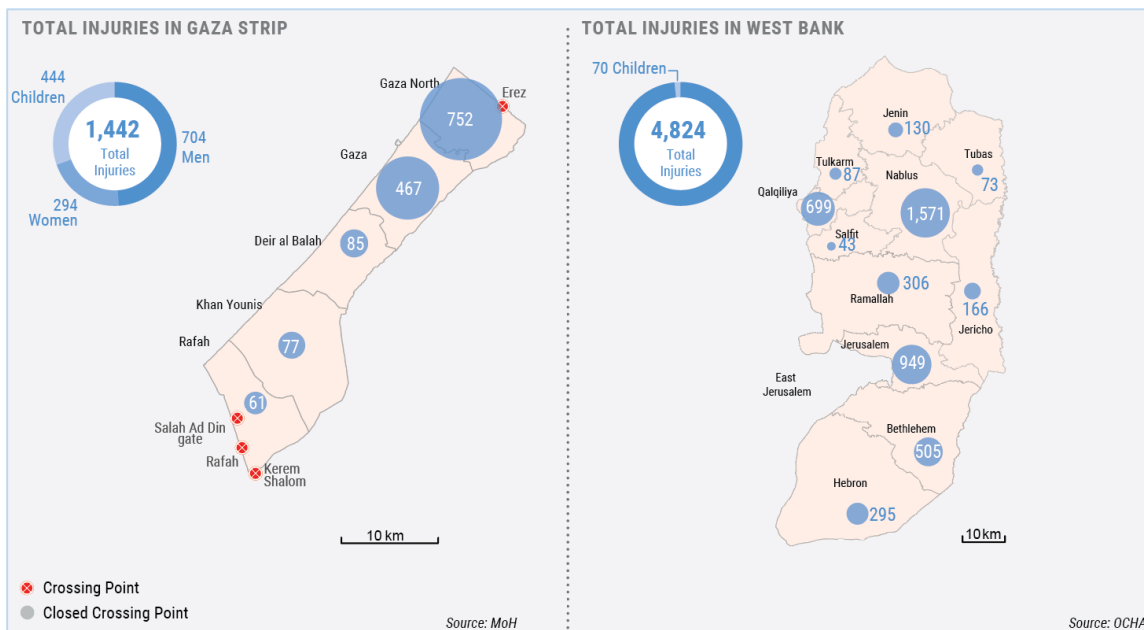
119 of those killed are civilians.² At least 202, including 59 children, were seemingly killed by Israeli forces. According to the Israeli authorities, some of the Palestinian casualties in Gaza may have resulted from Palestinian rockets falling short.

Palestinian armed groups continued extensive firing of rockets and mortars into Israel, with many intercepted by the 'Iron Dome' defence system, resulting in no additional fatalities during the reporting period. According to Israeli sources, between 10 May and 12:00 on 18 May, Palestinian armed groups in Gaza fired more than 3,500 rockets and other projectiles into Israel. By the end of the reporting period, ten people, including one soldier, have been killed by rocket fire or when running for shelter during rocket fire, and hundreds have been injured. The indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards densely populated areas in Israel is absolutely prohibited in any circumstances.



Infrastructure and Services

Hostilities have further damaged essential infrastructure, resulting in an additional decline in public access to basic services. According to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, since the start of the escalation, 156 buildings, comprising 672 housing and commercial units, have been destroyed. In addition, 502 housing units have been severely damaged, and rendered uninhabitable, according to the Shelter Cluster. An additional 239 housing units have suffered major damage, and 6,834 minor damage.



²Those reported as civilians are individuals who are not members of armed forces and were not directly participating in hostilities at the time that they were killed. Whether an individual is qualified as civilian or not, has no bearing on the legality of the killing. Data is based on information from at least three independent and reliable sources at the time of reporting. As further verified information becomes available, the number of fatalities in total, and in any of the categories, may change.

The Education Cluster reports that 50 education facilities, including 45 schools, two kindergartens, an UNRWA vocational training centre, a Ministry of Education facility have been damaged since the start of the escalation.

According to the Health Cluster, six hospitals and eleven primary healthcare centres have been damaged, with one centre suffering severe damage. One hospital is not functioning due to lack of electricity for the third successive day.

The Gaza Electricity Distribution company (GEDCO) has reported additional damage to feeder lines and networks, reducing the average power supply to 3-4 hours a day throughout Gaza. The reduction in electricity also affects service providers' capacity to operate water desalination plants, wastewater treatment plants, and water and sewer pumping stations. According to the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA), the regular water supply has dropped by more than 40 per cent due to the suspension, or reduction, in the operation of water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) facilities. This has been compounded by six strikes on water and sanitation pipelines on 17 May, undermining access to WASH services by more than 140,000 people in Khan Younis and the middle areas. An electricity converter feeding central water wells in Gaza city has also sustained severe damages. The North Gaza Seawater Desalination Plant is still not operational, which undermines the access of about 250,000 people to drinking water. In total, an estimated 800,000 people are lacking regular access to safe piped water.

Under IHL, only attacks against objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action or whose destruction offers a definite military advantage are lawful. Targeting civilian objects, including governmental buildings, homes and civilian infrastructure is absolutely prohibited in any circumstances. Attacks against military objects expected to cause a disproportionate harm to civilian objects are also forbidden.

Displacement

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) continues to rise. According to UNRWA, as of the morning of 18 May, 47,000 people are seeking protection in 58 UNRWA schools, up from 42,000 people in the previous reporting period. Another 25,000 people are staying with host families according to the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD).

Using available resources, UNRWA is helping those seeking shelter in its schools, by providing potable water, and ensure sanitary facilities, electricity during power outages through generators, and shaded school yards. Given the high density of IDPs during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the provision of personal protective equipment remains a priority.

Crossings

The Israeli authorities have authorized the entry of a limited number of truckloads carrying humanitarian supplies, however, only five of them, all carrying fuel, actually entered (see latest developments box above). The Erez passenger crossing remained closed, despite earlier indications that a number of international staff would be allowed to exit Gaza today, reportedly due to the hostilities taking place nearby.

While the Israeli authorities have not allowed any fuel for the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) to enter through Kerem Shalom, 500,000 litres of Egyptian imported fuel were delivered today through Salah Ad Din gate with Egypt, which will allow the GPP to operate, at a reduced capacity, for another four days. The Egyptian

Ministry of Health has sent a truckload of medical supplies, through Salah Ad Din gate, and on 20 May, the Egyptian authorities are expected to allow traders to import fodder through this gate.

The Rafah crossing with Egypt is open for passengers in both directions as normal. All fishing activity remains prohibited by the Israeli authorities off the Gaza coast.

West Bank, including East Jerusalem

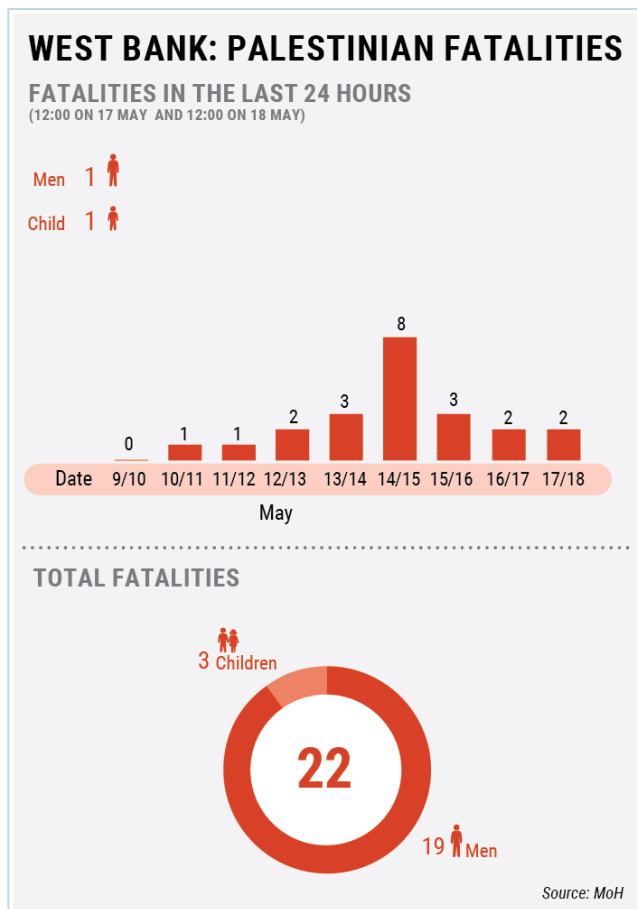
In the afternoon and evening of 17 May, Palestinians continued to demonstrate across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with clashes reported in multiple locations, including at checkpoints. During the reporting period, two Palestinians were killed and at least 91 others were injured across the West Bank, bringing the total number of deaths in the West Bank to 22 and the number of injuries to 4,824, since 10 May.

The two fatalities include a 17-year-old Palestinian who was shot and killed by Israeli forces in Al Arroub Refugee Camp, in southern West Bank, while allegedly throwing stones at a military tower. Another Palestinian was shot and killed by Israeli forces near a military gate surrounding the H2 area of Hebron city. The circumstances surrounding the latter fatality are currently unclear, as the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) paramedics were denied access to the scene.

According to OHCHR, the opening fire by Israeli forces in these fatal incidents raises concerns of excessive use of force. The use of potentially lethal force in law enforcing operations, including crowd control, is only allowed where there is a threat to life or of serious injury and even then must be used in a manner which aims at minimizing harm and preserving life.

Palestinian organizations and parties have called for a general strike on 18 May across the West Bank, as well as in Arab communities in Israel, to protest the current escalation in Gaza, as well as attacks against Palestinians in the West Bank, including the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, and in “mixed communities” in Israel. A heavy Israeli military presence is observed at the main junctions and checkpoints along the main roads of the West Bank.

All entrances to the Al Jaouni area of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, remain blocked by Israeli forces. The situation at the Haram Ash Sharif/Temple Mount compound remains relatively calm, with no entry by Israelis reported, although marches have reportedly been taking place around the Lions Gate of the Old City in the context of the Jewish feast of Shavuot.



HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE & ONGOING NEEDS

Protection

Gaza: According to the Protection Cluster, the large-scale displacement of people is triggering psychological distress, in addition to an increased risk of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) contamination. Most community-based protection interventions have been suspended due to the hostilities, including office-based and in-person services and other community education and awareness raising activities as well as an interruption of regular assistance and programming provided to persons with disabilities (PwDs). Many frontline workers have been directly affected by the bombardments. There is a great need for psychological first aid to those affected by the ongoing hostilities, as well as ERW mitigation and education. Further needs include specialized responses and accessibility for PwDs in shelters, psychosocial support, Non-Food Items (NFIs) and hygiene support for IDPs, including dignity kits for women and girls, and multi-purpose cash support.

West Bank, including East Jerusalem: Cluster partners are monitoring and documenting suspected violations and providing legal aid and child protection services, as well as mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS). Of ongoing concern is the possible use of excessive force by Israeli forces as well as attacks by Israeli settlers in general and the use of live ammunition against Palestinians in particular. Cluster partners continue to provide remote MHPSS and legal aid for those detained, and on an ongoing basis assess the possibility of resuming other protection interventions. Child protection and MHPSS partners are planning to conduct a needs assessment in East Jerusalem in early June 2021.

Health

Gaza: On 17 May, buildings belonging to the Ministry of Health (MoH), Qatar Red Crescent and Palestine Children's Relief Fund were partially damaged during the bombardment of a nearby building. The bombing in the vicinity of the MoH temporarily halted central laboratory services which include COVID-19 testing and other essential laboratory diagnosis. In addition, since the start of the hostilities, six hospitals and eleven primary healthcare centres sustained partial damages and one MoH primary healthcare centre sustained severe damage. Additionally, one NGO hospital is not functioning due to fuel shortages.

West Bank, including East Jerusalem: A general strike is taking place on 18 May across the oPt. Emergency medical services and volunteers are standing by in the anticipation of a potential escalation in confrontations.

Shelter

Gaza: According to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, hostilities have resulted in 156 buildings destroyed, comprising 672 housing units and commercial facilities, in addition to 502 housing units with severe damage (uninhabitable), 239 with major damage and 6,834 with minor damage. Partners are assessing the damages and support the repair of homes with major damage, giving priority to vulnerable groups. According to UNRWA, as of this morning, at least 47,000 people sought shelter in 58 UNRWA schools, including 23 designated emergency shelters (DES), still not officially open as such. Shelter partners have supported at least 512 affected families (2,048 people) with NFIs, although needs are

constantly increasing. Due to damage to power lines and fuel shortages, average power supply across Gaza has reduced to 3-4 hours per day.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Gaza: WASH infrastructure has been severely affected, including water and wastewater networks, 15 water wells, sewage evacuation vehicles, a landfill, a wastewater pumping station and several equipment and machinery due to damage, lack of power and difficult access. An estimated 800,000 people do not currently have access to piped water as a result of hostilities. In the past 24 hours, six attacks that struck water and sanitation pipelines were recorded by the WASH Cluster. These incidents have undermined the access to WASH services for more than 140,000 people in Khan Younis and the middle areas. A decrease in power supply (less than four hours per day) is undermining service providers capacities to operate water desalination plants, wastewater treatment plants, as well as water and sewer pumping stations. According to the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA), the water supply to people in Gaza has dropped by more than 40 per cent, due to the suspension or reduction of the operation of WASH facilities and services. The Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) and the relevant WASH service providers are urgently repairing damaged infrastructure. WASH service providers emergency fuel daily from the local market to operate the most critical WASH facilities. The WASH Cluster is coordinating with the PWA and CMWU to prioritize the most affected WASH facilities and infrastructure and supporting service providers by providing pre-positioned critical operation and maintenance materials and procuring emergency fuel to improve and maintain WASH services to the affected population. UNRWA will ensure the provision of required WASH services for those in designated emergency shelters (DES), while WASH Cluster partners are coordinating with the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) to reach remaining families with emergency WASH supplies.

Education

Gaza: Some 50 education facilities have been affected so far, including 45 schools, two kindergartens, an UNRWA vocational training centre, one MoE directorate building and a higher education facility have been impacted since the start of the escalation with reports indicating that a number were directly hit by airstrikes or tank shells. 58 UNRWA schools have been reportedly used as temporary shelters by displaced people. All schools are closed, and distance learning is not yet activated. About 600,000 students (51 per cent girls) have not returned to school, as scheduled on 16 May. Partners are scaling up remote MHPSS interventions, the delivery of emergency education supplies to displaced children, and will start resource mobilization to rehabilitate damaged education facilities. The Education Cluster assumes that education will not be provided, neither face-to-face, nor remote distance learning while the hostilities are ongoing: families are overwhelmed with competing needs and many areas of Gaza are facing power-cuts.

West Bank, including East Jerusalem: All schools are closed on 18 May due to a general strike taking place across the oPt. The Education Cluster is expecting an increase in attacks and intimidation by Israeli settlers, as well as harassment by Israeli forces at checkpoints if schools re-open while the situation is volatile. The Cluster is scaling up their reporting mechanism for education-related incidents, including requesting all partners to share timely incidents reports and deploy five incident verification officers across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In Shu'fat refugee camp, following clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces, tear gas canisters reportedly fell in Shu'fat UNRWA Boys School.

Gaza: The Kerem Shalom crossing point operated for a few hours on 18 May, allowing the entry of about 1,000 ton of animal feed. The entry of the trucks was coordinated following the request of the international community and approved by the Minister of Defense this morning. According to the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in Gaza, additional animal feed is expected to enter from Egypt through Salah Ad Din Gate on 20 May. The MoA in Gaza, in cooperation with other counterparts, is offering tax and customs exemptions to encourage fodder traders to import fodders from Egypt. Rising food needs are reported by Cluster partners: since 17 May, the World Food Programme (WFP) has supported an additional 17,000 people with immediate assistance through electronic vouchers, bringing the number of people supported by the programme to 73,776 since the hostilities began. Food assistance to designated emergency shelters (DES) is planned to begin on 21 May. This food assistance is crucial, and WFP continues to scale up as needs rise, as families are continuing to buy food on credit and decreasing the number of daily meals. The price of basic food and non-food commodities continue to increase, while the ongoing halt of fishing activities is directly affecting 3,600 households. WFP is undertaking road assessments to ascertain market routes and possible issues in commodity movement.

West Bank, including East Jerusalem: WFP has assisted some 50,000 people affected by COVID-19 restrictions in May.