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Israeli Forces Kill 93 Palestinians Seeking Aid in Gaza

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Gaza's civil defence agency reported that Israeli forces opened fire on Palestinians attempting to access humanitarian aid in the conflict-ravaged territory on Sunday, resulting in at least 93 deaths and numerous injuries. According to agency spokesman Mahmud Basal, 80 people were killed in the northern region as aid trucks arrived, while nine others were killed near an aid distribution point close to Rafah in the south. An additional four fatalities occurred near Khan Yunis, also in the south, Basal told AFP.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) confirmed that its 25-truck convoy, carrying essential food supplies, was met with “massive crowds of hungry civilians” near Gaza City, who came under gunfire shortly after the convoy crossed from Israel. The Israeli military, however, challenged the reported death toll, claiming soldiers fired warning shots to counter an “immediate threat” posed by thousands gathering in the area.

Such incidents have become distressingly common in Gaza, with local authorities attributing the deaths to Israeli forces as desperate crowds, grappling with severe shortages of food and essentials, flock to aid distribution points. The UN reported earlier this month that nearly 800 people have been killed in incidents related to aid distribution since late May, including along aid convoy routes.

In Gaza City, 36-year-old Qasem Abu Khater described the chaos to AFP: “I rushed to get a bag of flour, but there were thousands of people, and it was deadly overcrowding. Tanks were firing shells randomly, and snipers were shooting like they were hunting animals. Dozens were killed right before my eyes, and no one could help.” The WFP condemned the violence against civilians as “completely unacceptable.”

Due to media restrictions and limited access to parts of Gaza, verifying casualty figures and incident details independently remains challenging. The Israeli military insists it takes measures to avoid civilian casualties and claimed it recently issued updated instructions to troops following similar incidents. However, Israel’s decision on Sunday to revoke the residency permit of Jonathan Whittall, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Israel, drew criticism. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar accused Whittall of spreading falsehoods about the Gaza conflict in a post on X.

The war, ignited by Hamas’s attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, which killed 1,219 people, mostly civilians, according to official figures, has led to devastating consequences. Israel’s retaliatory campaign has resulted in 58,895 Palestinian deaths, predominantly civilians, per Gaza’s health ministry. On Thursday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed regret to Pope Leo XIV for a “stray” munition that killed three people sheltering at the Holy Family Church in Gaza City. Pope Leo XIV, during Sunday’s Angelus prayer, condemned the “barbarity” of the war and the strike on Gaza’s only Catholic church, calling for peace. The Catholic Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, held mass at the church on Sunday following a rare visit to Gaza on Friday.

The conflict has displaced most of Gaza's two million residents, with repeated evacuation orders issued across the territory. On Sunday, the Israeli military instructed residents and displaced individuals in Deir el-Balah to move south immediately due to planned operations. Families were seen fleeing with minimal possessions on packed donkey carts. One man told AFP, "They threw leaflets at us, and we don't know where to go. We have no shelter, nothing." The UN OCHA described the order as "another devastating blow" to Gaza's fragile lifelines, noting that 87.8% of the territory is now under displacement orders or militarised zones, confining 2.1 million civilians to just 12% of the Strip, where essential services have collapsed.

The latest evacuation order has heightened fears among families of hostages taken during Hamas's 2023 attack. Of the 251 hostages, 49 remain in Gaza, with 27 believed dead by the Israeli military. Indirect talks between Israel and Hamas over a proposed 60-day ceasefire and the release of 10 living hostages have been ongoing for two weeks. However, concerns persist that intensified military operations could endanger those still held.