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Israeli Forces Open Fire Near Gaza Aid Sites, 32 Killed

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At least 32 Palestinians were killed on Saturday as Israeli forces opened fire near food distribution centres in southern Gaza, raising serious concerns about civilian safety amid the ongoing conflict and deepening humanitarian crisis.

The violence unfolded near several sites operated by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), an organisation backed by the United States and Israel that has taken over some of

the aid distribution responsibilities in the region. These efforts aim to bypass the traditional United Nations (UN)-led system, which both Washington and Jerusalem allege has been compromised by Hamas. The UN, for its part, has rejected claims that its aid is being diverted by militants.

Eyewitnesses and hospital officials reported that Israeli gunfire erupted as crowds of Palestinians, many of them young men, approached a GHF aid hub roughly three kilometres from the city of Khan Younis. According to witnesses, Israeli forces initially fired warning shots before turning their weapons on the gathering. Mahmoud Mokeimar, a survivor, stated, "The occupation opened fire at us indiscriminately." Another witness, Akram Aker, said troops used tank-mounted machine guns and drones between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. to fire on the crowd.

Israel Defence Forces (IDF) claimed the gunfire was a response to individuals approaching troops near Rafah during overnight hours when the distribution centres were closed. The military emphasised it does not maintain a presence directly at the aid hubs but monitors them from a distance to ensure operational security. GHF has maintained that no incidents occurred at or directly around their centres and reiterated that individuals have been repeatedly advised not to arrive during nighttime hours.

The Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis confirmed receiving 25 bodies and treating 70 wounded individuals, most with injuries to the head and chest. Dr. Mohamed Saker, head of the hospital's nursing department, described the conditions as "tragic," citing a shortage of medical supplies. Further casualties were reported in other regions: seven killed near Rafah, two in Gaza City due to an airstrike on a displacement camp, and additional deaths from Israeli strikes in central and northern Gaza.

While Israel's military did not comment on individual airstrikes, it confirmed targeting roughly 90 sites in Gaza within 24 hours. The humanitarian situation continues to worsen, with over 2 million people in Gaza facing severe food insecurity. Videos from GHF sites show chaotic scenes of food boxes on the ground and desperate crowds scrambling for aid.

The conflict stems from Hamas's October 7, 2023, cross-border attack into Israel, where 1,200 were killed and 251 taken hostage. Around 50 hostages remain in captivity, with many feared dead. In response, Israel launched a large-scale offensive that, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, has resulted in over 58,000 Palestinian deaths. Though the ministry

operates under Hamas, it remains the primary source for casualty figures recognised by international bodies.

Ceasefire negotiations in Qatar have yet to produce tangible results. Over the weekend, thousands gathered in Tel Aviv to demand a deal to return the hostages and end the fighting. "After 652 days, it is time to do what is right for Israel: Bring all 50 hostages home and end this war," said Efrat Machikawa, a relative of a released hostage, during a rally.

In the West Bank, tensions also flared after extremist settlers allegedly set fire to the historic Church of St. George in the Christian village of Taybeh. United States Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, a longtime supporter of Israel, visited the site and condemned the attack, calling it "an act of terror and a crime."

As the conflict enters its 22nd month, calls for accountability and a return to humanitarian norms are growing louder, both within Israel and from the international community.