



13,000 Palestinians reportedly missing in the Gaza Strip



11 Apr 2024



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Palestinian Territory - Urgent international action is needed to set up special mechanisms and specialised teams to remove debris from homes and buildings that Israel's army has bombed, rescue those trapped alive under the rubble, and

retrieve the thousands of dead bodies stuck under it since the genocide began on 7 October 2023.

Decisive international pressure on Israel is necessary to facilitate the labour of the individuals and crews working to remove this rubble, including civil defense crews. Pressure must also be put on Israel to release information on the fate of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees from the Gaza Strip who are being held by Israeli army forces, plus those who have been victims of murder, unlawful execution, and enforced disappearance in Israeli prisons and detention centres.

Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor estimates that over 13,000 Palestinians are either missing under debris, buried in indiscriminate mass graves, or forcibly disappeared in Israeli prisons and detention facilities, where some have even been killed. The circumstances surrounding the deaths of these prisoners and detainees have not yet been made public by the Israeli army, nor have any independent investigators been able to confirm or determine the details of their deaths. These victims' bodies have not been exhumed, their identities have not been established, and their remains have not been repatriated, nor have their relatives been informed.

This estimate is based on initial reports of missing people, and the true number is likely higher. Given the ongoing military attacks and siege by the Israeli government, as well as the illegal practices of the Israeli army that have scattered Palestinian families—particularly by forcing them to repeatedly evacuate without safe passages, separating family members and forcing them to move to different areas, arresting and forcibly disappearing some of them, and cutting off communication between families—it is not possible to confirm the precise number of missing people at this time.

Euro-Med Monitor field teams together with civil defense crews and rescue teams recently used their limited resources to recover the bodies of 422 Palestinians from Gaza City's Al-Shifa Medical Complex as well as Khan Yunis, which is located in the south of the Gaza Strip, after the Israeli army withdrew from these areas over the course of the past few days. Family members of the victims also took part in the search and recovery process, where the victims were occasionally buried next to their homes or in haphazard mass graves, or moved to nearby hospitals.

Most of the recovered bodies had decomposed significantly due to the extended period of time between their death and recovery, and some had been clearly mauled by cats and dogs after Israeli forces impeded the bodies' retrieval for the past few months. This violates the victims' and their families' rights to a dignified burial, in accordance with their religious customs, which call for the dead to be buried separately in cemeteries with visible markings so that they can always be identified.

While retrieving dead bodies from under multi-storey buildings is extremely difficult, the bulk of the recovered bodies were found in simple one-storey buildings or on the streets. In order to search for bodies under thousands of tons of rubble destroyed by Israeli bombing, the civil defense teams use manual hammers, simple bulldozers, and antiquated devices. As a result, they labour long hours with little to show for their efforts, especially in light of the lack of fuel and electricity, which makes their work even less efficient. Trucks, specialised equipment, and enough fuel must be brought into the Gaza Strip immediately, in order to remove the debris, locate bodies, reach them, and raise or remove them in accordance with specific protocols to identify their owners and bury them in designated graves.

The bodies must be recovered immediately after death, as the current state of these decaying corpses poses a threat to public safety. The spread of epidemics, which has already begun and has been felt for several months now, will have further detrimental effects on the environment and public. Israel's crime of genocide has not spared even the dead, amid reprehensible international complicity.

The missing people in Gaza are divided into four categories:

1. The dead who have perished beneath the debris of houses or buildings they were inside, in the streets, on agricultural land, in areas where Israeli forces were spotted; those who were killed by Israeli forces and buried; or those who perished close to the border fence dividing the northern and eastern Gaza Strip, where Israeli forces set up execution zones and killed anyone who attempted to come close.

2. Dead people buried in haphazard individual or collective graves. The state of these graves varies between known people buried by their relatives or acquaintances, and unknown people buried by health authorities or local residents.

3. Those whose whereabouts remain unknown following their disappearance, either as a result of Israeli incursions or after their arrest; these individuals are victims of Israel's enforced disappearance policy, which targets Palestinian prisoners and detainees from the Gaza Strip. There is information indicating that many of these victims were subjected to arbitrary execution and torture, ultimately leading to their deaths without the disclosure of their identities.

4. Dead bodies that the Israeli army exhumed from mass graves in hospitals and surrounding areas. It is thought that Israel's army is still holding dozens of these bodies in custody, even though dozens of them have also been returned.

Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor earlier documented that more than 120 random mass graves were established in the Gaza Strip governorates to bury those killed in military attacks, due to the difficulty of accessing the main and regular cemeteries and the continued Israeli military operations.

Thousands of Palestinians are still missing, which is a further crime against their families, who endure terrible psychological abuse. This kind of suffering and pain is especially experienced by the families of those who were detained and taken prisoner by the Israeli army; they are left in a state of perpetual fear and anxiety, not knowing what will become of their loved ones, where they are being held, how they are being treated, or when they will be allowed to return. This comes as part of Israel's crime of genocide against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, which will have a significant negative impact on thousands of Palestinian families in the region, causing them great spiritual and psychological harm.

The international community must act swiftly and forcefully to defend Palestinian civilians against the genocide that Israel has been committing in the Strip for the past six months. The international community must also work together to ensure that Israel complies with international law and the ruling of the International Court of Justice, and is held responsible for all its crimes, including the massacre conducted in Al-Shifa Medical Complex.

Euro-Med Monitor urges the International Committee of the Red Cross to bear its responsibilities and verify the detention conditions of

Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons. The Red Cross must also take public stances and release statements each time Israel prevents it from carrying out its mandated duties, such as, most notably, paying visits to Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

Israel is required by international law to abide by certain rules, such as to protect and respect dead people's bodies during armed conflicts and take all reasonable steps to prevent parties to the conflict from depriving the dead of their dignity and from having their bodies mutilated.

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the issue of torture; and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances must promptly and thoroughly investigate all serious crimes committed by the Israeli army against Palestinian prisoners and detainees—including extrajudicial executions and killings, torture, inhuman treatment, and forced disappearances—and submit reports concerning these crimes to all relevant parties in preparation for the work of fact-finding committees and international courts in considering, looking into, and trying cases pertaining to this genocide.



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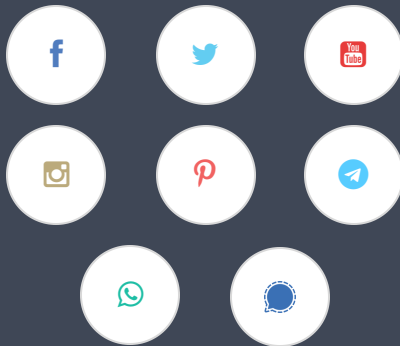
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