



## NEWS

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### **Gaza: Discovery of mass graves highlights urgent need to grant access to independent human rights investigators**

Responding to the discovery of mass graves containing hundreds of bodies at two of Gaza's hospitals, Amnesty International's Senior Director of Research, Advocacy, Policy and Campaigns, Erika Guevara Rosas said:

"The harrowing discovery of these mass graves underscores the urgency of ensuring immediate access for human rights investigators, including forensic experts, to the occupied Gaza Strip to ensure that evidence is preserved and to carry out independent and transparent investigations with the aim of guaranteeing accountability for any violations of international law. "Lack of access for human rights investigators to Gaza has hampered effective investigations into the full scale of the human rights violations and crimes under international law committed over the past six months, allowing for the documentation of just a tiny fraction of these abuses.

**Mass grave sites are potential crime scenes offering vital and time-sensitive forensic evidence; they must be protected until professional forensic experts with the necessary skills and resources can safely carry out adequate exhumations and accurate identification of remains.**

**Erika Guevara Rosas, Amnesty International's Senior Director of Research, Advocacy, Policy**

**and Campaigns**

"Without proper investigations to determine how these deaths took place or what violations may have been committed, we may never find out the truth of the horrors behind these mass graves.

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"The absence of forensic experts and the decimation of Gaza's medical sector as a result of the war and Israel's cruel blockade, along with the lack of availability of the necessary resources for the identification of bodies such as DNA testing, are huge obstacles to the identifications of remains. This denies those killed the opportunity to have a dignified burial and deprives families with relatives missing or forcibly disappeared the right to know and to justice – leaving them in a limbo of uncertainty and anguish.

**Ensuring the preservation of evidence is among the key measures the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Israeli authorities to take in order to prevent genocide. Amid a total vacuum of accountability and mounting evidence of war crimes in Gaza, Israeli authorities must ensure they comply with the ICJ...**

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"Ensuring the preservation of evidence is among the key measures the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Israeli authorities to take in order to prevent genocide.

"Amid a total vacuum of accountability and mounting evidence of war crimes in Gaza, Israeli authorities must ensure they comply with the ICJ ruling by granting immediate access to independent human rights investigators and ensuring that all evidence of violations is preserved. Third states must pressure Israel to comply with the ICJ orders by allowing the immediate entry into the Gaza Strip of independent human rights investigators and forensic experts, including the UN-appointed Commission of Inquiry and investigators of the International Criminal Court. There can be no truth and justice without proper, transparent independent investigations into these deaths."

**Background**

Palestinian officials reported that hundreds of bodies have been found at the sites of Al Nasser hospital in Khan Younes and al-Shifa medical compound in Gaza City.

On 26 January the International Court of Justice issued its first set of provisional measures, including the order for Israeli authorities to take "effective measures to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence" this includes not denying or otherwise restricting access by fact-finding missions, international mandates and other bodies to Gaza to assist in the preservation of evidence.