

Palestinian Rights Groups Snub ICC Prosecutor



Palestinians carry their belongings following Israeli strikes on residential buildings at the Qatari-funded Hamad City, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip December 2, 2023. (Reuters)

Palestinian human rights groups refused to meet the International Criminal Court prosecutor Karim Khan on Saturday, accusing him of favoring Israeli accusations of rights abuses over longstanding Palestinian charges.

Khan has been visiting Israel and the occupied West Bank following a request by a group representing families of victims of the Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas gunmen, but he was also due to meet Palestinian officials in Ramallah.

However Palestinian activists said they would refuse to see him because of their objections to what they saw as unequal treatment of Israeli and Palestinian cases.

"As Palestinian human rights organizations, we decided not to meet him," said Ammar Al-Dwaik, director general of the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR).

"I think the way this visit has been handled shows that Mr. Khan is not handling his work in an independent and professional manner," he said.

Accusations of war crimes and human rights abuses have been made on both sides since Oct. 7, when Hamas gunmen overran several Israeli communities around the Gaza Strip, killing more than 1,200 Israelis and seizing around 240 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

In response, Israel has launched weeks of air strikes against Gaza as well as an invasion by tanks and ground troops, killing more than 15,000 Gazans, according to Palestinian health authorities.

Khan was in Israel following an invitation from families of the Israeli hostages. He was scheduled to meet lawyers for the families' group as well as members of the families themselves.

On Saturday, he also met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah. The official Palestinian news agency WAFA said Abbas had urged Karim to investigate Israeli operations in Gaza as well as the occupied West Bank.

Israeli Air Strike in Gaza Kills Prominent Scientist Sufyan Tayeh



Palestinians flee from east to west of Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, during the ongoing Israeli bombardment, Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023. (AP)

An Israeli air strike targeting the town of Al-Faluja, 30 km (18 miles) northeast of Gaza City, has killed prominent Palestinian scientist Sufyan Tayeh and his family, the Palestinian Higher Education ministry announced on Saturday.

Tayeh, who was president of the Islamic University of Gaza, was a leading researcher in physics and applied mathematics.

Egypt Maintaining Efforts to Restore Calm in Gaza



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and French President Emmanuel Macron pose for a family photo, during the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, December 1, 2023. (Reuters)

Egypt is persistently engaged in efforts to restore calm between Hamas and Israel in the Gaza Strip.

“Cairo is currently seeking to restore calm and strengthen the truce and to prepare the way for the resumption of the peace process,” an Egyptian security source said.

On Friday, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi reviewed his country’s efforts to calm the situation and extend the humanitarian truce to reach a ceasefire in Gaza, as well as Egyptian efforts to receive the wounded Palestinians and evacuate foreign nationals.

During his meeting with world leaders on the sidelines of the 28th Session of Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Dubai, he underlined Egypt’s efforts to restore calm.

He stressed the need to provide the necessary protection for civilians, while striving to find the appropriate political path to reach a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue.

Sisi received several European officials in Cairo over the past week to discuss Gaza.

He met with Hungary's President Katalin Novák and the foreign ministers of Slovakia and Portugal, in addition to the prime ministers of Spain and Belgium.

According to official statements, talks underscored the vital importance of reaching a permanent ceasefire, and to propose political solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

During a meeting between Sisi and French President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines of the COP28 conference in Dubai, the leaders agreed on the vital importance of reaching urgent solutions to the ongoing crisis and taking action to ensure the access of humanitarian assistance.

They stressed the need to launch a comprehensive political process aimed at reaching a just settlement to the conflict based on the two-state solution and in line with the relevant international resolutions.

Sisi met with British PM Rishi Sunak, and they agreed on the gravity of the current situation in the Gaza Strip, especially in light of the uncalculated consequences of expanding the conflict on the stability of the region.

Meanwhile, an Egyptian security source said on Friday that "Egypt made urgent contacts with both the Israeli and Palestinian sides as soon as the Israeli attacks renewed on Gaza."

According to the German news agency, dpa, the source said Egypt and Qatar coordinated immediately after Israel resumed its attacks.

The source noted that both countries have initiated contacts with all parties involved in the implementation, monitoring and mediation of the truce, mainly the US, which joined Egypt and Qatar to help broker the now expired ceasefire.

The source confirmed that the talks were part of intensive negotiations held on Thursday night to extend the humanitarian ceasefire that lasted around seven days.

Israeli Shells Hit Southern Lebanon in Second Day of Violence after Israel-Hamas Truce Ends



Smoke and fire rise from a building following an Israeli strike on what the Israeli military says are Hezbollah targets in a location given as Lebanon, amid the ongoing cross-border hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces, in this screengrab taken from an undated handout video released on November 24, 2023. Israeli army/Handout via REUTERS

Israeli forces and Hezbollah militants exchanged fire across the Israel-Lebanon border on Saturday in a second day of hostilities after the collapse of a truce in Gaza between Palestinian group Hamas and Israel.

Iran-backed Hezbollah said in a statement that one of its fighters was killed but did not specify when. Three people in south Lebanon were killed by Israeli shelling on Friday in south Lebanon, according to Lebanon's state news agency. Hezbollah said two of the dead were its fighters, Reuters reported.

Hezbollah also said it fired rockets at an Israeli position. Israel's military said two mortar bombs launched from Lebanon fell in open areas in Shomera, across the border from the south Lebanon village of Marwahin. The military said it responded by attacking the launch site and elsewhere in south Lebanon.

Earlier on Saturday, shelling from Israel hit close to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) headquarters near the coastal town of Naqoura and around the border village of Rmaych, a UNIFIL spokesperson said.

The Israeli military said it carried out shelling near Naqoura after spotting "unusual activity" in the area. UNIFIL also detected fire around 11 a.m. (0900 GMT) from the area of Tayr Harfa, about a mile from the Israeli frontier, toward Israel, the spokesperson said.

Following the eruption of the Hamas-Israel war on Oct. 7, Hezbollah mounted near-daily rocket attacks on Israeli positions at the frontier while Israel waged air and artillery strikes in south Lebanon. But the border was largely calm during the week-long truce in the Gaza war.

It has been the worst fighting since the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, a Hamas ally.

Just over 100 people in Lebanon have been killed during the hostilities, 83 of them Hezbollah fighters. Tens of thousands of people have fled both sides of the border.

Two Pro-Hezbollah Members Killed in Israeli Strikes Near Damascus



Smoke billows above buildings after an Israeli strike on the outskirts of Damascus on November 22, 2023. (Photo by AFP)

Two pro-Hezbollah Syrian fighters have been killed in Israeli air strikes near Damascus, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Saturday.

The air attack targeted positions of the Iran-backed party in Damascus.

“Two Syrian fighters loyal to Hezbollah have been killed and seven other fighters working with the party were wounded overnight in Israeli air strikes on positions near Sayyida Zeinab” in the southeast of the capital, observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman told Agence France-Presse.

Successive violent explosions sounded in Damascus in parallel with anti-aircraft missiles fired by the Syrian regime at the Israeli missiles.

The bombing is the second this week, said the Observatory. On November 26 Israel bombed an Air Defense Forces base in the al-Mazzeah area and Damascus International Airport, putting the airport out of service and wounding an officer and two other personnel.

According to the Observatory, Israel has targeted Syrian territory 56 times since the beginning of this year, 41 of which were air strikes and 15 ground strikes.

The missile strikes destroyed 115 targets including weapons and ammunition depots, positions and vehicles. It also killed 102 military personnel, wounded 120 others in addition to civilians.