

Hamas says open to 5-year Gaza truce, one-time hostages release

AFP – Hamas is open to an agreement to end the war in Gaza that would see all hostages released and secure a five-year truce, an official said Saturday ahead of talks with mediators.

A Hamas delegation was in Cairo to discuss with Egyptian mediators ways out of the 18-month war, as on the ground rescuers said an Israeli strike on a family home in Gaza City killed at least 10 people and left more feared buried under the rubble.

The Hamas official, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said the Palestinian militant group “is ready for an exchange of prisoners in a single batch and a truce for five years”.

The latest bid to seal a ceasefire follows an Israeli proposal which Hamas had rejected earlier this month as “partial”, calling instead for a “comprehensive” agreement to halt the war ignited by the group’s October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

The Israeli offer included a 45-day ceasefire in exchange for the return of 10 living hostages.

Hamas has consistently demanded that a truce deal must lead to an end to the war, a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and a surge in humanitarian aid into the besieged territory – where on Friday the United Nations warned food stocks were running out.

Israel, for its part, demands the return of all hostages seized in the 2023 attack, and Hamas’s disarmament, which the group has rejected as a “red line”.

More than a month into a renewed Israeli offensive in Gaza

after a two-month truce, a Hamas official said earlier this week that its delegation in Cairo would discuss “new ideas” on a ceasefire.

– ‘The house collapsed’ –

In Gaza City, in the territory’s north, the civil defence agency said a strike on the Al-Khour family home killed 10 people, with an estimated 20 more trapped in the debris.

Umm Walid al-Khour, who survived the attack, said that “everyone was sleeping with their children” when the strike hit.

“The house collapsed on top of us,” she told AFP.

“Those who survived cried for help but nobody came... Most of the deceased were children.”

Elsewhere in the city, three people were killed in Israeli shelling of a house in the Al-Shati refugee camp, civil defence official Mohammed al-Mughayyir said.

More strikes across the Gaza Strip killed four others.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

Qatar, the United States and Egypt brokered one truce which began on January 19 and enabled a surge in aid, alongside exchanges of hostages and Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

But it collapsed amid disagreements over the terms of the ceasefire’s next stage.

After blocking aid during the impasse in negotiations, Israel resumed bombarding Gaza on March 18, followed by a ground offensive.

– Low on food, medical supplies –

Since then, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, at least 2,111 Palestinians have been killed, taking the overall war death toll in Gaza to 51,495 people.

The Hamas attack on October 7, 2023 that triggered the war resulted in the deaths of 1,218 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

Militants also abducted 251 people, 58 of whom are still held in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead.

Israel says the renewed military campaign aims to force Hamas to free the remaining captives.

On Friday, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) – one of the main providers of food aid in the Palestinian territory – said it had “delivered its last remaining food stocks to hot meals kitchens in the Gaza Strip”.

It said “these kitchens are expected to fully run out of food in the coming days”.

Following the WFP warning, the World Health Organization's chief said medical supplies were also “running out” in Gaza while 16 WHO trucks wait to enter.

“This aid blockade must end. Lives depend on it”, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X.

Despite warnings from aid agencies and foreign governments, Israel has denied there is hunger in Gaza and says blocking aid is meant to pressure Hamas into releasing hostages.

AFP