

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	667
Land:	Gaza-Vestbredden
Kilde:	CNN
Titel:	UNRWA - Gazaremsan
Udgivet:	9. november 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	5. februar 2024

UNICEF defends accuracy of Gaza death toll as horror unfolds in ravaged enclave



CNN —

A UNICEF spokesperson has defended the death toll being reported out of Gaza, saying the organization's figures had historically matched those of the Hamas-controlled Gazan health ministry.

More than 10,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli airstrikes in the past month – including thousands of women, children and elderly, according to the [Palestinian Ministry of Health](#) in Ramallah, drawing from sources in Hamas-controlled Gaza.

Israel declared war on the Islamist militant group Hamas after its brutal October 7 attack, in which it killed 1,400 people in Israel and kidnapped about 240 others. Israel's offensive on Gaza has since razed neighborhoods and bombed thousands of what it says are Hamas targets, including in refugee camps. Israel Defense Forces warnings have prompted many to flee to the southern part of the strip.

CNN cannot independently verify the health ministry's death toll. But UNICEF spokesperson James Elder said on Tuesday the organization's estimates had closely aligned with the ministry's in the past, which gave him confidence in the current figures. He told CNN's Julia Chatterley: "Our numbers were within a couple of percent of that, almost identical. We don't have that concern based on past history."

"At UNICEF we are very, very precise with our numbers. We have the reputation, not just because we are on the frontlines and we deliver, but we have evidence," he said.

He said UNICEF was rigorous with its reporting procedures, using triangular verification to analyze intelligence, which takes more time but is "much more thorough."

"I know the boys and girls and the moms and dads behind (the numbers) and that's – I think for UNICEF – why we're so outraged that they keep spiking and that we can't get a humanitarian ceasefire," he said, adding there are "parents who now will wake with grief every single day."

Figures from Gaza have been met with skepticism in some quarters, with US President Joe Biden saying last month he had “no confidence” in the reported number of civilian casualties. A White House spokesperson said afterward the ministry was a “front for Hamas,” though did not dispute that thousands of Palestinians, many innocent civilians, had been killed.

After Biden’s comments, the Gazan health ministry published a 212-page report listing the deaths in Gaza since the war began that it blamed on Israel. The list does not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants.

Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf told a congressional panel Wednesday that “it is very difficult for any of us to assess what the rate of casualties are,” adding, “it’s very possible that it’s even higher than what’s being reported.”

“We think they’re very high, frankly,” she said. “It could be that they’re even higher than are being cited. We’ll know only after the guns fall silent.”

On Tuesday, scores of Palestinians evacuated northern Gaza during a four-hour window allotted by the Israeli military. Videos show children, women and the elderly walking down the highway holding up their identification cards, and white flags signaling their hope for safe passage.

The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said some 5,000 people fled to southern Gaza by foot during another four-hour window on Monday.

Amputations without anesthesia

Calls for a ceasefire have grown more urgent and widespread internationally, as more details emerge of the suffering unfolding in the isolated strip, which is nearly entirely cut off from the outside world.

A World Health Organization spokesperson said on Tuesday some Gaza doctors had been performing operations without anesthesia, including amputations.

“Nothing justifies the horror being endured by civilians in Gaza,” WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier said during a press briefing. He reiterated the UN’s calls for “unhindered, safe and secure access” for some 500 trucks of aid a day — not only across the border but also “all the way through to the patients in the hospitals.”

On Monday, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said more than 400 trucks had entered Gaza through the Rafah crossing in the past two weeks — compared to the 500 trucks that used to enter every day before the war.

Emily Callahan, a nurse activity manager for the non-profit Doctors Without Borders, was in Gaza last week and saw the devastation firsthand.

“There were children with just massive burns down their faces, down their necks, all over their limbs, and because the hospitals are so overwhelmed, they are being discharged immediately after,” she told CNN on Tuesday. “And they are being discharged to these camps with no access to running water ... They are given two hours of water every 12 hours.”

She described seeing children walking around with severe wounds and “partial amputations.” Their parents would go to her and the other aid workers asking for help — “and we have no supplies,” she said.

Aid convoy attacked

Even humanitarian aid is not guaranteed safe passage through the bombarded streets of Gaza, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). On Tuesday, the organization said its humanitarian convoy came under fire when it was delivering essential medical supplies to health facilities in Gaza City.

The convoy consisted of five trucks and two Red Cross vehicles. Two trucks were damaged in the attack, and a driver sustained minor injuries, the organization said.

“These are not the conditions under which humanitarian personnel can work,” William Schomburg, the head of the ICRC delegation in Gaza, said in a statement. “We are here to bring urgent assistance to civilians in need. Ensuring that vital aid can reach medical facilities is a legal obligation under international humanitarian law.”

Guterres said in a statement afterward: “I am horrified by the reported attack in Gaza on an ambulance convoy outside Al-Shifa hospital.”

Israel accuses Hamas of using ambulances, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure for military purposes, including transporting fighters and weapons, and says it will strike “anywhere we see Hamas activity – a green (head)band and a terrorist.”

And while Guterres reiterated his condemnation of Hamas’ attacks and demanded the immediate release of hostages held in Gaza, he emphasized the urgent need for a ceasefire – comments that have previously been lambasted by Israel’s leaders, who have called for his resignation as UN chief.

“Now, for nearly one month, civilians in Gaza, including children and women, have been besieged, denied aid, killed, and bombed out of their homes,” Guterres said in the statement. “This must stop.”

This story has been updated to clarify that UNICEF’s confidence about current casualty figures is based on past verification.