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# Israel Said 150,000 Gazans Must Flee South. Then the South Was Hit by Bombs

Monday 25 December 2023, by [HASS Amira](#) (Date first published: 25 December 2023).

**The humanitarian conditions in southern Gaza were already harsh and the crowding unbearable. There were reports of bombings at 6:51, 6:58 and 7:17 P.M. - and that was just the beginning**

*People fleeing after Israeli airstrikes on the Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza last month. Credit: Yasser Qudih/AFP*

On Friday morning the Israel Defense Forces' Arabic-language spokesman Avichay Adraee ordered more than 150,000 people in central Gaza's refugee camps and neighborhoods to leave immediately. "For their safety," they would head for havens in the Deir al-Balah district to the south.

The area they were supposed to leave is about 9 square kilometers (3.5 square miles) large, according to UN calculations based on a map published by [the IDF](#).

Ninety thousand of the people who were supposed to evacuate immediately are residents of central [Gaza](#)'s refugee camps and neighborhoods, while 61,000 have been [displaced](#) from northern Gaza during the war and moved to six shelters in the area. Another unknown number of displaced people - required to leave again - are living with their relatives and friends in the Bureij and Nuseirat refugee camps, the village of Al-Mughraqa and the city of Al-Zahra.

One person who was supposed to evacuate immediately is the 80-year-old mother of my friend A.E., a resident of a refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. Nobody knows whether her home in the camp, where she lives with her two sons, is still standing, and whether she'll ever return. How would the new evacuation "for her safety" look?

*A fireball erupting after an Israeli strike on southern Gaza on Wednesday. Credit: Said Khatib/AFP*

She is all but paralyzed due to an illness. In recent years she has also lost her sight and needs round-the-clock care. In the two months since the family moved to a classroom at a school of [the UNRWA refugee agency](#) in Nuseirat, they have done everything possible to make her comfortable.

She can't sleep on the floor, so they found a carpenter who crafted a bed from classroom desks. They made sure that she would be near the bathroom, that she would be warm, that she wouldn't have contact with too many people so she wouldn't catch a disease, and that [the water](#) she drinks would always be purified no matter how many hours they had to wait in line to buy a gallon especially for her.

They hoped she would be able to remain in this temporary home until the end of the war, but Adraee ordered that evacuation "for their safety."

*Palestinians leaving a site hit by an Israeli strike on Rafah in southern Gaza on Wednesday.Credit: Fatima Shbair/AP*

"We're in a major crisis," A.E. wrote to me at 7 A.M. Saturday. They couldn't find a car with gas to take them to the south. It would be hard to get their mother into a cart harnessed to a horse or donkey, and they were afraid she would fall ill if she stayed out too long in the cold and rain.

They'd be leaving behind the bed they worked so hard to build for her, and it wasn't certain there would be room on the cart or in the car for the mattresses they managed to buy two months ago. A mattress is another expensive, highly demanded item these days.

A.E. and his wife were also afraid that for part of the way they would have to go on foot and carry his mother. Neither of them is young. They wanted to take her to Rafah near Gaza's border with [Egypt](#), where they could stay with relatives. But the journey would be frightening.

Meanwhile, when Israel's time-out for the mass evacuation expired and the family couldn't leave Nuseirat, the bombing was resumed in central Gaza. At 6:48 P.M. on Friday, the news website Watan reported heavy bombing in the south of Deir al-Balah.

*A woman cooking at a tent camp in Rafah last week.Credit: Mahmud Hams/AFP*

At 6:51 P.M. there was a report of people wounded in the bombing of an apartment building in the Maghazi refugee camp. At 6:58 came a report of wounded people in a bombing of an apartment building in the east of Nuseirat.

At 7:17 P.M. it was two dead and several wounded in a bombing of the home of the Abu Nar family in Nuseirat. At 7:20 - warships shelled western Nuseirat. At 8:18 - a house was shelled in Bureij, where there were later reports of five dead. At 8:23 - several wounded in a bombing of a house in Nuseirat.

Later it was reported that it was the home of the Khalifa family; there were dead and wounded, and one of the dead was journalist Muhammad Al-Saidi of Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV. Was he the target? There's no way of knowing. At 10 P.M. it was reported that 18 people were killed in the bombing.

[The IDF Spokesperson's Unit](#) ordered an evacuation to Deir al-Balah as a safe place. Sure enough, a friend who left Gaza City with his family and has been living for two months in a relative's home reported that the evacuees began arriving Friday. They reached the jammed city where hundreds of thousands were already scattered in the streets, cars and schools.

*Palestinians amid the destruction after an Israeli strike on the city of Deir al-Balah last month.Credit: Hatem Moussa/AP*

At 1:22 A.M., Watan reported that a home in Deir al-Balah - yes, the safe area - had been bombed. At 2:18 - the wounded were rushed to the hospital. At 4:47 on Saturday morning Watan reported two dead in the bombing of a house in western Deir al-Balah. At 4:54 it was the bombing of the home of Fahed al-Asar in Nuseirat.

At 6:57 - the home of the Ustaz family in Deir al-Balah was bombed, and the wounded were rushed to Shuhada al-Aqsa Hospital. At 7:15 the shelling of an apartment building next to the Al-Ihsan Mosque in Nuseirat was reported. At 2:11 P.M. it was the bombing of the Timraz family home in the Deir al-Balah refugee camp. There were dead and wounded.

All these bombings and shellings hit central Gaza without counting those in the north and south and

the exchanges of fire proudly reported by  [Hamas](#)’ Iz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades and Islamic Jihad’s Al-Quds Brigades.

### *Video*

A.E.’s mother can’t see and doesn’t hear very well, but she can clearly feel the blast of every bomb. She instinctively curls up and trembles every time. She doesn’t complain. She doesn’t want to trouble her family.

Over the phone, for the first time since 30 years ago I met A.E., a university lecturer, I heard him crying. “I go out into the street; you can’t walk there because it’s so crowded. Everywhere I encounter thirsty and hungry people, and I can’t help them,” he said.

*Palestinians lining up for food in Rafah on Thursday.Credit: Fatima Shbair/AP*

"People beg me to find them a tent. People who have – who had – homes in Gaza are begging for a tent, for a little privacy.

"You can’t find pain relievers in any of the pharmacies. There are no medicines for the chronically ill, no vaccinations for newborns. Every night we die 10 times, only we aren’t buried. A few days ago four members of my family were buried under the ruins of their home after bombing.

“And my cousin, he wasn’t even a praying person – he didn’t have any connection to any organization. My mother, after she took care of us all her life, worked so we could study. I can’t even protect her from the next bombardment, and from the terrible fear of it.”

**Amira Hass**

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### **P.S.**

• Haaretz. Dec 25, 2023 4:55 pm IST:  
<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-12-25/ty-article-magazine/.premium/israel-said-150-000-more-gazans-must-flee-south-then-the-south-was-hit-by-bombs/0000018c-9c9e-dedf-a9ce-9fbef8380000>

• *Amira Hass’ articles in Haaretz:*  
<https://www.haaretz.com/ty-WRITER/0000017f-da24-d494-a17f-de27b9aa0000>