

'I pray to God it succeeds': Fragile hope spreads in Gaza as ceasefire deal reached

Thursday 16 January 2025, by [Ahmed Ahmed](#), [AMER Ruwaida Kamal](#) (Date first published: 15 January 2025).

After 15 months of devastation, Palestinians are anxiously awaiting the chance to reunite with loved ones and return to what remains of their homes.

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Palestinians celebrate the announcement on a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, January 15, 2025.(Abed Rahim Khatib/Flash90)

It is a pattern with which Gazans are painfully familiar: as reports of an imminent ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas began swirling earlier this week, the Israeli military unleashed hell on the besieged Strip, killing at least 62 Palestinians in the past 24 hours.

Among the latest victims was 25-year-old activist and children's entertainer Ahmed Al-Shawa, who was killed along with several of his colleagues in an airstrike on Gaza City's Al-Daraj neighborhood. Al-Shawa was known among Palestinians in the Strip as "the smile ambassador" for his sense of humor, energy, kind-heartedness, and passion for his [work](#): bringing joy to Gaza's children despite the harsh conditions of the ongoing genocide.

Rajab Al-Rifi, a neighbor and colleague of Al-Shawa's, is unable to come to terms with the loss of his friend. Just two days earlier, on Jan. 12, they had put on an entertainment show together for dozens of displaced children. They had discussed their hopes that a ceasefire would enable them to expand their work, and planned a series of additional activities to help children cope with their trauma, including mental health workshops.



Al-Rifi explained that Al-Shawa was loved by everyone around him due to his generosity. "He sometimes put on three or four shows in one day for hundreds of children," Al-Rifi told +972. "Every Wednesday since the beginning of genocide, he would do a show by himself in Gaza City's Municipal Park, where dozens of people have sought refuge. He aimed to put smiles on children's faces despite their ongoing trauma."

Tragically, Al-Shawa was killed as he was on his way to join colleagues for an event at a makeshift tent camp in central Gaza City. His death has left a deep sense of grief among the people of Gaza, especially those who knew him. "He was a source of strength and hope to his colleagues, friends, and children," Al-Rifi said. "What did he do to deserve being killed like this?"

Ahmad Al-Shawa leads an entertainment show for children in the Al-Daraj neighborhood of Gaza City, November 15, 2024. (Omar El Qattaa)

Despite Al-Rifi's earlier optimism about an imminent ceasefire, he now fears for his own safety and has canceled planned activities due to the intensification of Israeli attacks. "Anyone in Gaza could be a target," he said. "I fear I could be next."

'I dream of the moment I will meet my children again'

Despite the relentless Israeli bombings across the Gaza Strip, many Palestinians remain cautiously optimistic that this time a ceasefire could hold. In some tent camps, displaced residents were already celebrating in the belief that they might soon return home — even as their houses lie in ruins — and reunite with family members from whom they have been separated.

Laila Al-Masri, 55, who fled the Israeli army's [assault on the northern city of Beit Lahiya](#) two months ago, now resides in a makeshift tent in Gaza City's Al-Yarmouk Stadium. She remains desperately hopeful for the moment she can return to her house and finally bury two of her three sons, who were killed in an Israeli airstrike in November 2024 and whose bodies remain trapped under the rubble of their home. Her remaining son and daughter are displaced in the southern part of the Strip.

"I lost two of my sons, and I pray to God day and night for this ceasefire to succeed before I lose any more loved ones," she told +972. "I can accept living in a tent on the ruins of my house, as long as we are no longer at risk of being killed at any moment."

Despite the unimaginable losses, Al-Masri remains cautiously hopeful about the future. "I believe that, in the coming days, we will be able to return to our homes, access food and clean water, and see our children wearing warm clothes and returning to their studies," she said. "No one can truly understand the pain we have been enduring — the fear, the starvation, the sleepless nights in the cold. A ceasefire would give us the chance to rebuild our lives and start over."

Palestinians celebrate the announcement on a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, January 15, 2025. (Abed Rahim Khatib/Flash90)

This sense of optimism is shared by Salem Habib, a 45-year-old from [Jabalia refugee camp](#) who has been struggling with the severe hardships of his displacement in the [so-called "humanitarian zone"](#) of Al-Mawasi, near Khan Younis in southern Gaza. "I am very optimistic about the success of the truce," he said. "I haven't slept while thinking about that moment."

For over a year, Habib has been separated from his three sons and other relatives who remained in the north of the Strip when he evacuated southward with his wife and daughters at the start of the war. "My eldest son Ahmed was wounded and in a difficult condition," Habib recounted. "I used to talk to him every day, saying 'You have to be strong and endure the pain so we can meet again.'"

The thought of losing his sons has consumed Habib. "This was my great fear: that I would lose one of them and return to the north only to not see them alive," he said. "That is why I await the [final] ceasefire announcement with great patience. I dream of the moment when I will meet my children and grandchildren again."

Life in the displacement camp, far from Habib's neighborhood and community, has been extremely difficult, and he is desperate to return home. "If I find it in ruins, I will put up a tent and live there anyway," he said, adding that he has already begun sorting through his belongings in preparation. "We are all waiting for the moment when we will be able to rest from this ongoing nightmare of

bombing, killing, and hunger.”

‘What will be left of our lives?’

But not everyone is so optimistic about the future. Momen Ashraf, 35, who asked to use a pseudonym for safety reasons, is skeptical of the reports of a deal. “Every time there’s talk of a ceasefire, the situation gets worse,” he said. “It’s as if the Israeli forces don’t want anyone left alive in Gaza.”

Palestinians at the site of an Israeli air strike, at the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, January 15, 2025. (Ali Hassan/Flash90)

Ashraf ran an accessories shop next to his house on western Gaza City’s Tal Al-Hawa Street, but he and his family were forced to abandon both under intense bombardment in the first days of the war. In late October 2023, shortly after they had evacuated, their house was bombed.

They were subsequently displaced four more times to various temporary shelters, and are now living in a relative’s house on Gaza City’s Al-Sahaba Street. Ashraf currently operates a stall selling canned food to make a living for his family.

“Our life before the war was not perfect due to the [siege and bad economic situation](#) in Gaza, but it was a dream compared to what we’ve been through over the past year,” Ashraf said. “Thirteen of my relatives were killed, and my 6-year-old son was wounded two weeks ago. My home and livelihood were destroyed — for what?”

Ashraf believes that Hamas bears some responsibility for giving Israel an excuse to launch its genocidal war on Gaza after the October 7 attack, with innocent Palestinians forced to pay the price. “Israel has been killing us since 1948, but the surprise attack of October 7 gave them a reason to kill more,” he said.

“Israeli forces killed our loved ones and destroyed our homes, schools, streets, belongings, and beautiful memories,” Ashraf continued. “Most people in Gaza want to live a normal life with peace, we are tired of loss, humiliation, starvation, and displacement. How many lives must be taken before this ends?”

For Ashraf, like many others in Gaza, the announcement of a ceasefire offers little hope for healing and reconstruction in the Strip. “Even if the ceasefire is real, we will need years to recover from what we’ve endured,” he said. “And even then, what will be left of our lives? If I survive this, I will do everything I can to leave Gaza and start over. I don’t believe that anyone cares about us, even the Palestinian factions.”



Northern Gaza, as seen from a viewpoint near the fence with Israel, January 15, 2025. (Oren Ziv)

‘I know my house was badly damaged. I can make do’

Saeed Al-Akhras, a 32-year-old Arabic teacher from Gaza City who was displaced to Al-Mawasi, is eager for the ceasefire to hold so he can go back to teaching and reunite with his students. “I will return to the north on the first day of the ceasefire,” he told +972. “I will return to my neighborhood and set up a tent to teach the students there. I miss my students — I want their noise to return to my life.

“I haven’t slept since we started getting the news reports about the deal,” he continued. “I was forced to flee the north because of my fear for the safety of my three children, and I feel that our return is very close. I hope that the deal will succeed. We are tired and need the war to end so we can return to the north.”

While many of the displaced are waiting to go back to their cities and neighborhoods in northern Gaza, 29-year-old Narmin Kassab is desperate for the ceasefire to begin so she can return to the southern city of Rafah — though she knows that this may take time. Kassab had to flee Rafah in May when [the Israeli army invaded the city](#) and destroyed her neighborhood of Tel As-Sultan, forcing her to take refuge in a displacement camp in Deir Al-Balah.

“We know that when the war ends our homes will not be returned to us, but at least we will no longer hear the sound of bombing and news about more victims,” she said. “I won’t go to Rafah immediately; we will stay in the camp because Tel As-Sultan was completely destroyed and there is no infrastructure, and most importantly no water.”

Jawaher Obaid, who is currently residing in a tent in Al-Mawasi, is waiting to return to her home in Gaza City’s Sheikh Radwan neighborhood and reunite with her daughters who remained there when she fled with her son Walid. But Walid will not be with her: he was killed in an Israeli airstrike last February.

“I do not know how I will meet my daughters without having their brother Walid with me,” she told +972. “I will be forced to come to the south often to visit my son’s grave. I will not leave him alone here.”

And when she returns north, she is not planning to take anything from the tent camp with her. “The tent and everything in it reminds me of the worst days of my life,” she explained. “I miss my daughters a lot, and I miss my house. I know it was badly damaged but it is still standing; I can make do and live in it.”

Ahmed Ahmed and Ruwaida Kamal Amer

P.S.

- +972 Magazine. January 15, 2025:
<https://www.972mag.com/gaza-ceasefire-fragile-hope-palestinians/>
- Ahmed Ahmed is a pseudonym for a journalist from Gaza City who asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal.
- Ahmed Ahmed’s article on +972 Magazine:

<https://www.972mag.com/writer/ahmed-ahmed/>

Ruwaida Kamal Amer is a freelance journalist from Khan Younis.

- Ruwaida Kamal Amer's article on +972 Magazine:
<https://www.972mag.com/writer/ruwaida-kamal-amer/>

Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war. The world is reeling from Israel's unprecedented onslaught on Gaza, inflicting mass devastation and death upon besieged Palestinians, as well as the atrocious attack and kidnappings by Hamas in Israel on October 7. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing this violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to intensify their attacks on Palestinians. The most far-right government in Israel's history is ramping up its policing of dissent, using the cover of war to silence Palestinian citizens and left-wing Jews who object to its policies.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 14 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, entrenched occupation and apartheid, and a normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment - but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is a leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists, activists, and thinkers can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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