

Israeli forces kill 12 in Gaza as Palestinians demonstrate on Land Day - Thousands of protestors injured

Friday 30 March 2018, by [BALOUSHHA Hazem](#), [HOLMES Oliver](#), [Middle East Eye \(MEE\)](#) (Date first published: 30 March 2018).

Thousands of protestors injured as Palestinians demand call for the right of return, end to land grabs.

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Israeli forces killed at least 12 Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip on Friday, according to Palestinian authorities, as tens of thousands of protesters were demonstrating across the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel on Friday on “Land Day”, notably marking the beginning of the “Great March of Return” in Gaza.

The Gaza Ministry of Health confirmed that 11 Palestinian demonstrators had been killed by Israeli forces on the border with Israel, identifying the slain Palestinians as Mohammad Kamel Najjar, 29, who was killed near Jabalia in northern Gaza; Mahmoud Abu Muammar, 38, near Rafah in the south; Mohammad Abu Amro, a well-known artist in the Gaza Strip; 16-year-old Ahmad Odeh, north of Gaza City; Jihad Farina, 33, east of Gaza City; Mahmoud Rahmi, 33; Ibrahim Abu Shaer 22, near Rafah; Abd al-Fattah Bahjat Abd al-Nabi, 18; abd Abd al-Qader al-Hawajra, 42, killed in central Gaza; Sari Abu Odeh; and Hamdan Abu Amsha, near Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza.

The Ministry also stated that at least 1,000 demonstrators had been wounded as of late afternoon, although a spokesperson for the Palestinian Red Crescent Society told MEE they estimated that some 800 protesters in Gaza had been injured by live fire.

Hours before the protests, an Israeli tank shell killed one Gaza farmer and wounded another, the Gaza health ministry said.

Thousands of Palestinians gathering east of the Gaza City neighbourhood of Shejaiya for Land Day demonstrations on 30 March (MEE/Mohammad Asad)

“Omar Samour, 27, was martyred and another citizen was wounded as a result of (Israeli) targeting of farmers east of Qarara village,” a Gaza health ministry spokesman said. Residents of the southern Gaza Strip village said Samour had been gathering crops to sell later.

An Israeli military spokesman confirmed the incident. “Overnight two suspects approached the security fence and began operating suspiciously and the tank fired towards them,” the spokesman said.

'Brutal violation'

Human rights NGO Adalah denounced the Israeli army's use of live fire as a "brutal violation of the international legal obligation to distinguish between civilians and combatants," and called for an investigation into the killings.

The Israeli army announced in a statement that it had declared the border area of the Gaza Strip a closed military zone - meaning all Palestinians getting close to the border fence could risk getting shot.

"The march has achieved its goals, it has shaken the pillars of the entity (Israel), and laid the first brick for the road of return," Ismail Haniyeh, one of Hamas' top political leaders, told MEE, while visiting a protest camp in Gaza.

Held annually, Land Day marks the killing by Israeli troops of six Palestinian citizens of Israel on 30 March 1976 during a protest against land confiscations.

In the Gaza Strip, where 1.3 million of the small territory's two million inhabitants are refugees, protest organisers have called for six weeks of demonstrations called the "Great March of Return" along the border of the besieged Palestinian enclave and Israel, starting on Friday and culminating on 15 May for Nakba Day.

Palestinians wave flags and fly kites during a demonstration as part of the Great Return March on 30 March (MEE/Mohammad Asad)

"Seven hundred meters away from those soldiers lies my right and the Palestinian people's right to return home after 70 years of displacement. We will not wait another 70," Alaa Shahin, a young Palestinian man who was celebrating his wedding at a protest camp near Jabaliya, told MEE. "I still keep the original documents for our land in Nilya, which I inherited from my father," said Yousef al-Kahlout, a retired history teacher who attended one of the Gaza demonstrations on Friday with five of his grandchildren. "Today, I explain to my grandchildren that they have the right to regain possession of it if I am not alive to achieve my dream to return."

While Gaza organisers have insisted that the demonstrations will be peaceful, several incidents of Gazans being detained after entering Israel in recent days - including three Palestinians who were carrying weapons - have seen Israeli forces keen to prove their control of the situation.

The Israeli army confirmed in a statement that it was using "riot dispersal means" - a term typically used to refer to tear gas and sound bombs - as well as firing at "main instigators" of the protest.

The Great March of Return also saw Israeli forces use drones to drop tear gas on the demonstrators - a technology that has only been used a few times in Gaza by Israeli forces.

Israel's military chief said on Wednesday that more than 100 snipers had been deployed on the Gaza border ahead of the planned mass demonstration near the frontier. Heavy earth-moving vehicles have built up dirt mounds on the Israeli side of the border and barbed wire has been placed as an additional obstacle against any mass attempt to breach the border into Israeli territory.

Land Day protests in Israel, West Bank

Meanwhile, Palestinians demonstrated in Israel and the West Bank on Friday to commemorate Land Day. In the Palestinian-majority town of Arraba in the Galilee region of northern Israel, thousands, including Palestinian MPs from the Israeli Knesset, heads of municipalities, and religious figures, took to the streets.

Prior to the march, members of the Knesset's High Follow-Up Committee for Arab citizens of Israel visited the graves of the six Palestinian citizens of Israel who were killed during the first Land Day March in 1976, in cemeteries in Arraba, Sakhnin, and Deir Hanna.

"Israel is still stealing and confiscating our lands, and the oppression continues against our people inside '48, in the diaspora, and in Gaza," Arraba Mayor Ali Asleh said in a speech, using a term to refer to the lands on which Israel declared its state in 1948.

Palestinian citizens of Israel march in Arraba to mark Land Day (MEE)

According to Palestinian media, clashes took place in some West Bank towns, including Ramallah-al-Bireh, Hebron, Bethlehem, Nablus, Qalqiliya, and a number of villages.

A spokesperson for the Palestinian Red Crescent told MEE that the organisation treated at least 63 demonstrators in the West Bank, the majority of whom suffered from excessive tear gas inhalation, while at least 10 were injured by rubber-coated steel bullets.

On 30 March 1976, Israeli forces killed six Palestinian citizens of Israel during a protest against land confiscations. Palestinians have since marked Land Day for the past 42 years to denounce Israeli policies to take over Palestinian land.

This year's Land Day comes on the heels of months of anger over US President Donald Trump's decision to move the American embassy to Jerusalem, largely perceived as the United States rejecting Palestinian claims to East Jerusalem as their capital as part of a two-state solution.

Nakba Day this year will also mark 70 years since the creation of the state of Israel and the forced displacement of 750,000 Palestinians, whose descendants now number millions living as refugees abroad or in the occupied Palestinian territory.

With Israeli political discourse veering further to the right under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinians have grown increasingly disillusioned regarding the likelihood of negotiations or an improvement in their living situation in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Israel itself.

MEE and agencies

* MEE. Friday 30 March 2018 06:31 UTC. Last update: Friday 30 March 2018 16:39 UTC :

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/gaza-farmer-killed-israeli-tank-shell-protesters-prepare-land-day-march-1026170817>

Palestinians die in clashes with Israeli forces during major border protest

Israel says thousands of Palestinians 'rioting' on first day of planned six-week demonstration over right of return for refugees.

At least 12 Palestinians have been killed and hundreds wounded by Israeli forces in Gaza, Palestinian medics have said, as protesters kicked off a planned six-week demonstration demanding the right of return for refugees.

Israel's military said 17,000 Palestinians were "rioting" in six locations in the Gaza strip on Friday, rolling burning tires at the security fence and its troops, which it said responded "with riot dispersal means and firing towards main instigators".

Israeli forces enforce a no-go zone for Palestinians on land in Gaza close to the fence and regularly fire on young Palestinian men who hurl stones and firebombs.

But organisers said the "Great March of Return" demonstration intended to be peaceful, and would comprise of families of men, women, and children camping. Cultural events, including traditional dabke dancing, are planned.

While protest camps within Gaza were set up a few hundred metres back from the heavily fortified barrier, large crowds marched on Friday towards the fence and started throwing rocks. Ten men with bullet wounds were seen being carried away on stretchers. All had been shot in the legs.

Israel dismissed the entire demonstration as a Hamas ploy. Its military had deployed reinforcements around Gaza, including more than 100 special forces sharpshooters and paramilitary border police units.

"We are identifying attempts to carry out terror attacks under the camouflage of riots," Maj Gen Eyal Zamir, commander of the Israeli military's Southern Command, which includes the border, said on Friday.

The Palestinian health ministry said at least 500 Palestinians have been hurt by live fire, rubber-coated steel pellets or teargas fired by Israeli forces along the fence.

The protests coincided with the start of the Jewish Passover, when Israel security forces are normally on high alert.

Hours before demonstrations even started on Friday, the first fatality occurred. A Palestinian farmer was killed and a second Palestinian was wounded by an Israeli tank shell, according to Gaza's health ministry.

Witnesses said the man was working on his land, but an Israeli army spokesman said the two suspects were "operating suspiciously". Gaza's health ministry later said three men were shot dead during clashes.

Ahead of the protest, Israel has made clear it was considering force to prevent what is feared might be a "deliberate charge on its borders".

The Israeli foreign ministry pre-emptively placed the blame for any clashes on " Hamas and the other Palestinian organisations who have manufactured this entire campaign".

Friday marks Land Day, a commemoration of the killing of six unarmed Arab protesters in Israel in 1976, who were demonstrating land confiscations in northern Israel.

At one of the protest camps near Gaza City, a few dozen tents had been erected and residents were walking around, some carrying the Palestinian flag.

Fatima Nasser, 65, said she had come with her seven children, all of whom were unemployed. "To die with dignity is better than living a life full of humiliation. We will return to our land, we will return to our homeland," she said. "Israel kills us anyway, whether it's by shooting or blockade."

Eighteen-year-old Mahmoud Younis said he had come to show the world that Gazans “deserve to live”. “No one looks at us, no one thinks about us, we will continue to camp here and come daily until someone looks at us and there is a solution to this difficult and miserable reality.”

Gaza’s rulers Hamas back the sit-in, which is expected to last until 15 May. On that date, Palestinians commemorate the Nakba, or “catastrophe”, when hundreds of thousands fled their land or were expelled from their villages during the war around the time of the creation of Israel in 1948.

The majority of Gaza’s two million residents are refugees from the mass displacement or their descendants, according to the United Nations.

On 14 May, Israel will mark its 70th anniversary and a controversial new US embassy is set to be opened in Jerusalem after US president Donald Trump broke with international consensus to recognise the holy city as Israel’s capital.

The move infuriated Palestinians, who claim the annexed eastern sector of the city as the capital of their future state. It also led the Palestinian leadership to reject the US as a mediator for peace.

Trump’s Middle East envoy, Jason Greenblatt, said ahead of Friday’s protest that Hamas was “encouraging a hostile march on the Israel-Gaza border”.

Saeb Erekat, a senior Palestinian negotiator, said: “Israel’s official incitement against the rights and lives of the Palestinian people has little to do with Israel’s security and a lot to do with perpetuating control over our lives by attacking every non-violent action.”

Desperation among Gazans also deepened after Washington cut funding to the UN agency responsible for Palestinian refugees, sparking fears that schools and healthcare provided by UNRWA would exacerbate an already dire humanitarian situation.

The coastal enclave has suffered from a crippling blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt. An already-disastrous humanitarian situation worsened after the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority refused to pay for Gaza’s electricity, in part to press it’s political rival Hamas to loosen control of the area.

Hazem Balousha in Gaza City and **Oliver Holmes** in Jerusalem

* The Guardian. Fri 30 Mar 2018 13.55 BST First published on Fri 30 Mar 2018 12.14 BST : <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/30/palestinians-march-to-gaza-border-for-start-of-six-week-protest-israel>

Israeli army opens fire as tens of thousands march in Gaza

At least 7 Palestinians have been killed and at least 500 wounded during the first day of what the organizers are calling ‘The Great Return March,’ 45 days of protests and events planned to mark 70 years since the Nakba.

Thousands of Palestinians are protesting in Gaza near the border fence with Israel on Friday. The protest marks the beginning of the “Great Return March,” a 45-day series of events planned to culminate on May 15, Nakba Day. While the Israeli army has portrayed the march as a violent

provocation organized by Hamas, the march's organizers have stressed that the march is an apolitical, non-violent protest against the unbearable living conditions in Gaza and for the Palestinian right of return.

Updates from 972 on the protests:

Update 4:15

Protests marking Land Day are also taking place in the West Bank. The Red Crescent is reporting 30 Palestinians wounded, mainly from tear gas inhalation and rubber-coated bullets, during protests in Hebron, Ramallah, and the Nablus area.

Update: 4:00 pm

The Palestinian Ministry of Health is reporting that a seventh Palestinian has been killed. More than 500 Palestinians have been wounded during the protests.

Ayman Odeh, chairman of the Joint List, denounced the army's use of live ammunition against unarmed protesters. "On the Jewish festival of freedom of all days, the residents of the world's largest prison are asking to live. Men, women, and children, residents of Gaza, are marching to demand their freedom, facing off against indifference and cruelty. From Israel's perspective, there is no legitimate form of Palestinian protest. Even such a model of non-violent popular struggle is met with armed soldiers who do not hesitate to fire at unarmed demonstrators. Israel must immediately stop the shooting and allow the residents of Gaza to carry out their just and legitimate protest."

Update: 2:45 pm

Since the early morning, Gazans have been gathering all along the eastern border of the Gaza Strip. On the edge of Shajaia, near the disused Karmi checkpoint, Mouna Jadalah tells +972 Magazine's correspondent, "We are coming here today in peace, with no stones, nothing not any kind of weapons. I hope the army will deal with this march of return wisely, and will not shoot at the protesters."

Update: 2:15 pm

The Palestinian Ministry of Health is reporting 365 Palestinians wounded and four killed since this morning.

Update: 2:00 pm

According to a statement released by the Israeli army spokesperson's unit, 17,000 Palestinians are protesting at five different locations along the border fence with Gaza.

Though the return march is being organized by a range of different groups, Israel continues to label the march a Hamas-organized event. "Hamas is entirely responsible for the events and their consequences," the army spokesperson stated. The Israeli army, meanwhile, is using live ammunition and tear gas against the Palestinian demonstrators.

While the organizers are affiliated with the full range of Palestinian political parties and movements, the Hamas leadership did attend the march Friday morning and Ismail Haniyyeh reportedly gave a speech in the morning.

Update: 1:45 pm

The Red Crescent reports that a Palestinian protester has been killed, raising the total number of casualties to two.

Update: 1:15 pm

Palestinian media is reporting that dozens of protesters have been injured since the march began this morning. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent, 54 Palestinians have been injured, the majority by Israeli live fire.

This year Palestinians will mark 70 years since the Nakba (in Arabic, the catastrophe) in 1948. During the 1948 war and its aftermath, Israel destroyed hundreds of Palestinian villages and more than 700,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from their homes. Some 70 percent of the Gazan population are refugees, meaning they or their grandparents fled or were expelled from towns, villages, and cities inside the territory that became Israel in 1948.

+972 Magazine spoke to one of the organizers of the 'Great Return March' earlier this week. According to Hasan al-Kurd, a leftist organizer in Gaza, the plan is to set up camps between between 700-1000 meters from Israel's border fence, outside the Israeli army's unilaterally imposed buffer zone, where anyone who enters is liable to be shot. In the weeks leading up to Nakba Day, there will be marches and bicycle races and other events every week, aiming to draw more attendees along the way. By mid-May, tens or hundreds of thousands are expected to join.

"We want families. We want to live in peace — with the Israelis," al-Kurd said. "We're against stone throwing or even burning tires. We will make sure the protest doesn't escalate to violence — at least from our end."

Even before the march began, however, Israeli security forces launched a public campaign painting the 'Great Return March' as a violent, Hamas-sponsored event. The Israeli army's chief of staff announced the deployment of 100 snipers and several infantry brigades to the area of the Gaza border fence. Israeli generals warned that there will be casualties. The Israeli army personally threatened bus company owners and their families against transporting protesters to the border. "From my point of view," COGAT Gen. Yoav Mordechai told Al-Hura TV, "if bus companies you own take some of the protesters and bring them to the border, you and your families will be held personally responsible."

Friday's march in Gaza also coincides with the anniversary of Land Day, which itself commemorates how in 1976 Israeli security forces responded to a general strike and mass protest of Palestinian citizens of Israel by killing six and wounding some 100 others.

On Land Day and Nakba Day in 2011, thousands of Palestinians from Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza, and inside Israel marched on the country's borders. On the Lebanese, Syrian, and Gaza borders, the army responded with gunfire, killing dozens and wounding hundreds.

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* The Dawn News / March 30, 2018:

<http://www.thedawn-news.org/2018/03/30/israeli-army-opens-fire-as-tens-of-thousands-march-in-gaza/>
