

## **The Violence in Israel Continues**

*May 19, 2021*

**Despite talk of a ceasefire, the rockets from Gaza have continued unabated, and the IDF has responded in kind. However, a measure of calm has returned to mixed Jewish-Arab towns, with considerably less rioting and violence.**

Here are the main updates:

### **Rocket Fire**

- More than 3,750 rockets have been fired into Israel from Gaza since attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups began last week.
- Overnight, once again, rockets were fired at tens of targets in Israel's south and the center. See footage [here](#) captured of a Hamas rocket hitting a residential building in the Israeli coastal town of Ashdod yesterday, and the aftermath of the rocket strike [here](#).
- In addition, numerous rockets were fired towards three major Israeli air force bases in the country's south yesterday, but no hits were reported.
- Since fighting began, 13 people in Israel have been killed by rocket fire and more than 330 have been injured.
- Yesterday morning, the Keren Shalom Crossing from Israel into Gaza was set to be opened by the IDF in order to allow the transfer of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population, and to allow for the exit of foreign nationals.
  - Forty trucks loaded with food, medical equipment and humanitarian aid were ready to cross, carrying supplies sent from Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv.
  - The aid was donated by OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), UNICEF, the Red Cross and Doctors without Borders.
  - At 11:00 am, Hamas fired mortars at the crossing, preventing the aid convoy from getting through.
  - At 1:30 pm, there was another attempt to allow the convoy to go through. While eight trucks managed to enter, another mortar attack was carried out in which an IDF soldier was injured.
  - At 2:45 pm, a third round of mortars was fired at the crossing, killing two Thai workers

and injuring another 10 Israeli civilians.

- Despite the attacks, Israel has said that it remains committed to ensuring the transfer of humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza.
- See [here](#) for video of Israel facilitating the transfer of aid convoys to Gaza.
- In the last 24 hours, repeated reports of an impending or unofficial ceasefire have been received, and there have in fact been numerous periods of several hours without rocket fire, for the first time since fighting began. However, on each occasion, the lull ended, and rockets resumed. Nonetheless, various media reports in Israel suggest that the fighting will likely end in the coming days, when some sort of ceasefire agreement is reached.
- On Israel's northern border, six rockets were fired from Lebanese territory toward Israel by a Palestinian group yesterday. None of the rockets successfully crossed into Israeli territory.
- Separately, the IDF downed a drone flying toward the area of Beit She'an in northern Israel from Jordan yesterday, (although it is possible that the unmanned vehicle originated in Syria).
- This fast motion [video](#) shows the rockets that have been fired at Israel since the beginning of the current conflict.
- Jewish residents of the border areas near Gaza released [this video](#) showing their resiliency, despite the rockets.

### Israeli Response

- Israel continues to strike at terror targets inside Gaza, and claims to have inflicted considerable damage on the terror group's infrastructure, and ability to carry out future attacks.
- Overnight, the IDF continued to strike Hamas' underground tunnel network (known as the " Hamas Metro"). Some 52 Israel Air Force planes dropped over 100 bombs in 25 minutes along 7 miles of the tunnel network. See footage [here](#) of the strikes on the tunnel network overnight.
- In total, some 65 miles of underground tunnels and terrorist infrastructure have been destroyed during the current campaign. See video [here](#).
- The IDF also struck an underground launch site and rocket launchers belonging to Hamas last night, and hit a Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror cell preparing to launch rockets toward Israel.
- In total, the IDF bombed 120 targets over the past 24 hours, including 10 rocket launchers. According to the IDF, a total of 65 launchers, which can fire between four and nine rockets within seconds, have been destroyed over the past three days
- Palestinian sources say that 200 people have been killed in Gaza in the current conflict, including 59 children and 35 women, and another 1,300 have been injured. Israeli authorities say that 150 terrorists are among the dead.
- Israel continues to take what the IDF describes as "extraordinary steps" to warn non-combatants and avoid Palestinian casualties. In [this](#) newly released video from the IDF, pilots can be heard communicating with their command desk as strikes are held off due to civilian presence.

### Protests in Israel

- After initial days of heavy rioting among Israel's Arab Israeli population, and reprisals from Jewish protestors, most of the unrest within Israel's borders has now quieted down or stopped completely.
- A 56-year-old Jewish Israeli resident of Lod, Yigal Yehoshua, died yesterday, six days after he was critically injured during riots in the mixed Jewish-Arab city. Police said they are treating the incident as a terror attack.
- An Arab man in Jaffa was arrested for a fire-bomb attack on a home that left a 12-year old Arab boy severely injured. Police claim that the assailant believed the home was owned by Jews.
- In the recent rioting, 10 synagogues were set ablaze, and stockpiles of rocks and Molotov cocktails were found in 28 mosques. One Arab-owned home (and 13 Arab-owned cars), as well as 112 Jewish-owned homes (and 849 Jewish-owned cars) have been set on fire, and a further 13 Arab homes and 673 Jewish homes damaged.
- Increasingly, joint Jewish-Arab groups are meeting and promoting coexistence. See [here](#) for pictures of a group giving out "peace flowers." Similarly, a group of religious leaders issued a public statement which has now been signed by 120 rabbis, imams, sheikhs and other religious leaders denouncing violence and calling for an end to the unrest.

## **Diplomacy**

- Prime Minister Netanyahu yesterday said, " Hamas brazenly fired rockets at Jerusalem and other Israeli cities in a totally unprovoked attack. This past week, millions of Israelis were forced into bomb shelters as missiles rained down on our cities. Several Israelis have been killed. Many more have been wounded. You know and I know, no country would tolerate this. Israel will not tolerate this. Israel has responded forcefully to these attacks and we will continue to respond forcefully until the security of our people is reinstated and restored."
- Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke with US President Joe Biden on Monday, in the third conversation between the two since the beginning of Operation Guardian of the Walls . The White House said in a statement that "The President reiterated his firm support for Israel's right to defend itself against indiscriminate rocket attacks... and welcomed efforts to address inter-communal violence and to bring calm to Jerusalem. He encouraged Israel to make every effort to ensure the protection of innocent civilians.... expressed his support for a ceasefire, and discussed US engagement with Egypt and other partners towards that end. The two leaders agreed that they and their teams would remain in close touch."
- Prime Minister Netanyahu also spoke with German Chancellor Angela Merkel who reiterated her unreserved support for Israel's right to defend itself. The Prime Minister thanked her for the action of her government against anti-Semitic elements in Germany and emphasized that Hamas is committing a double war crime by firing missiles from inside civilian populations and by using civilians in Gaza as human shields.
- Defense Minister Benny Gantz said that "the IDF operation, which has achieved significant military achievements in recent days, will continue with the aim of bringing long-term peace."

## **Jewish Federations and Partners**

- The Jewish Agency for Israel:

- The Jewish Agency's [Fund for the Victims of Terror](#), supported by Jewish Federations, continues to distribute emergency funds to those who have suffered from a direct rocket attack. So far, 135 checks of \$1200 each have been distributed since the start of this crisis.
  - Yesterday, JFNA's Senior Vice President for Israel and Overseas Rebecca Caspi and Agency CEO Amira Ahronoviz joined UIA Canada's Israel Director, Arie Levy to distribute checks. See [here](#) for video and [here](#) for photos of a check being given to a family of olim from Argentina whose home was hit by a rocket. (The person in IDF uniform speaking in the video is Arie Levi, who is currently doing reserve duty in the IDF). Also see [here](#) for videos of checks being presented to victims in Ashdod.
  - The Jewish Agency has also taken 720 families from their absorption centers in Ashkelon, Ashdod and the surrounding areas to Jerusalem, Haifa and other locations for five days of respite.
  - In the south, Agency absorption centers are currently home to 2,440 Olim from Ethiopia and 240 Olim from the West, totaling 2,680 Olim.
  - The Agency's Partnership2Gether is holding a virtual meeting as "a time for us to be together in solidarity with our staff, community members, participants and volunteers across Israel." The meet will take place on Wednesday May 19, at 10:00am (EST) - join [here](#).
  - See [here](#) for a full update of the Jewish Agency's activities during the current conflict.
- The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC):
    - JDC's Virtual CIL (Center for Independent Living), provides a virtual space for people with disabilities to receive essential information about their rights and benefits, enjoy social gathering and networking, and participate in peer learning and a range of relevant activities. It was an important meeting place during the pandemic, and since the current crisis began, has been retrofitted to offer emergency support and critically needed human connection. See [here](#) for a video of one participant describing her experiences.
    - Trauma treatment in the education system – Educators are on the front lines, providing emotional support to schoolchildren, their parents and school staff. JDC staff are supporting local psychological counseling services and working with the Ministry of Education to plan trauma care treatment within the education system in cities and villages most affected by the current crisis.
    - Material support for families in distress – Program staff are working with families living in poverty and distress to resolve urgent issues. Responses range from releasing funds for food and other basic needs to families who are sheltering from rockets, to assisting a family who lost all their possessions when a rocket destroyed their home in southern Israel.
    - Support for mixed Arab and Jewish program staff – JDC is creating forums for respectful dialogue, to counter feelings of fear, anger and trauma. JDC have hosted discussions with program staff to ensure a safe, inclusive work environment and to rebuild trust where necessary; and are currently planning dialogue sessions on social cohesion and shared

society.

- Round Tables to Raise Awareness and Address Issues Relating to People with Disabilities During the Crisis – JDC organized three different round tables each relating to different aspects of the crisis and its impact on individuals with disabilities. This included a round table of young leaders with disabilities and government representatives to discuss accessibility of information and protected spaces and a round table for the Israeli-Arab community.

### **Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC)**

- Direct care-ITC is seeing an unprecedented increase in calls to hotlines, which are receiving on average more than 1,200 calls per day. Currently, in the Gaza Envelope alone ITC is treating over 2,000 people a day through home visits, hotline assistance, group intervention and support for First Responders. Over 62% of the population in southern Israel is receiving some form psychosocial care.
- Mixed communities-Against a backdrop of ongoing unrest in the streets, a general strike of Palestinians and Arab Israelis across Israel, West Bank and Gaza on Tuesday, ITC is continuing its work in mixed communities including Lod, Ramla, Jerusalem, Acco and Haifa. ITC is working with the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services, to strengthen teams, dealing with issues of breach of trust and personal security. It is also working with the emergency teams in the Department of Education, providing tools to the educational staff, parents and children to deal with the conflicts and uncertainty.
- Teams- Health, first responders, emergency teams and social service teams are experiencing alarming rates of fatigue and burnout. ITC is helping to support teams nationwide with a particular emphasis on those who work with vulnerable population groups. Interventions include tools to eliminate stress, improve well-being and include a self-care component.

**As always, Jewish Federations, through JFNA's Israel Office, is keeping a constant watch on developments on the ground and is in close touch with authorities, and our partners on the ground.**

*For more information, please contact JFNA's [Dani Wassner](#), Director of Israeli Government Relations.*

**Sources:** *Office of the Prime Minister, IDF Spokesperson, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Government Press Office, N12 Israel News, The Times of Israel, Galei Tzahal Radio, The Jerusalem Post, Ynet, i24 News, Alma.*