

Israel-Hamas war

Israeli air strike on Gaza aid convoy kills five Palestinians

Fourth attack on aid workers this week follows shooting of armoured car for the World Food Programme



American Near East Refugee Aid staff deliver water to displaced people in Gaza. All five of those killed worked for a transportation company that was providing logistics and security for Anera © Anera

Mehul Srivastava in London and **Neri Zilber** in Tel Aviv YESTERDAY

At least five people were killed in an Israeli air strike on an aid convoy carrying fuel and medicine to a hospital in southern Gaza, a day after a food convoy was shot at near an Israeli checkpoint.

The five Palestinian men killed were in the lead vehicle of a convoy for the Washington-based American Near East Refugee Aid agency, whose movements had been co-ordinated with the Israeli military, the agency and two other people familiar with the issue said.

“This is a shocking incident,” said Sandra Rasheed, Palestine country director for Anera, in a statement, adding that the remaining vehicles in the convoy had continued on to the Emirati Red Crescent Hospital. “We are urgently seeking further details about what happened.”

The Israel Defense Forces said it had targeted the lead vehicle in the convoy after “a number of armed assailants seized control” of it and that the strike had “removed the threat of them seizing control over the humanitarian convoy.”

“After the takeover and further verification that a precise strike on the armed assailants’ vehicle [could] be carried out, a strike was conducted,” the IDF said.

All five of those killed worked for a transportation company that was providing logistics and security for Anera, a 56-year-old aid agency that works in the occupied West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan and Lebanon.

The convoy was driving on the north-south Salah al-Din road to a field hospital run by the United Arab Emirates at about 5.30pm when it was struck from the air, the people familiar with the matter said.

It was the fourth attack on aid workers in the past week, including a major incident on Wednesday in which an armoured car for the World Food Programme was hit 10 times with bullets as it approached an Israeli checkpoint, prompting the agency to suspend operations temporarily.

“This is totally unacceptable and must change immediately,” said Cindy McCain, the executive director of WFP, one of the largest humanitarian agencies in the world. “We have repeatedly asked for a functioning deconfliction system in Gaza, and yet the current arrangements have failed.”

Two other aid convoys also came under fire in recent days, highlighting the continued danger to humanitarian workers in the Gaza Strip, who have come under repeated fire from Israeli troops and have had to fend off looters desperate for the limited amount of food that aid agencies are able to distribute in the besieged enclave.

Israeli military air strikes have killed more than 200 Palestinian employees of UNRWA, the main UN agency providing relief in Gaza has said.

The Israeli military had pledged to improve its system of coordinating aid convoys’ movements in the area under its control after admitting fault in an April air strike that killed seven World Central Kitchen workers, including six international aid workers.

In May, an Israeli tank opened fire on a UN car, killing an Indian national and injuring a second UN employee, according to two UN officials. The IDF said at the time that it was investigating the issue.

Aid agencies, especially the UN, have repeatedly raised concerns about the reliability of the co-ordination mechanism through which aid convoys are cleared for their movements in Gaza.

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