

Israel-Hamas war

Five dead in latest Israeli shootings of Gazans seeking aid, say local officials

Killings follow series of deadly incidents since contentious US- and Israeli-backed distribution system began operations



The health ministry in Gaza said five people were killed while trying to access aid, and that dozens more had been injured in the latest incident near Rafah © Hatem Khaled/Reuters

James Shotter in Jerusalem

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Israeli soldiers killed five Palestinians as they tried to reach an aid site in Gaza, said local officials on Sunday, in the latest deadly shooting since a controversial new distribution system was set up in the enclave.

The killings have fuelled mounting international condemnation of the new Israeli- and US-backed system, under which a previously unknown private group called the [Gaza Humanitarian Foundation](#) has replaced the UN as the main conduit for aid deliveries to the shattered strip.

The health ministry in [Gaza](#) said five people were killed while trying to access aid, and that dozens more had been injured in the latest incident near Rafah in southern Gaza early on Sunday.

The Israeli military said its soldiers had fired warning shots after “several” people approached them “in a way that endangered the troops”. It said the incident took place during the night, when Israel treats the areas around aid hubs as active war zones.

The killings are the latest in [a string of similar incidents](#) since the new aid system took effect in Gaza, where the UN warned last month that the entire 2.1mn population was at risk of famine, after Israel blocked all deliveries of aid, food, fuel

and medicines for more than two months.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said on Sunday that its field hospital in Rafah had to activate its mass casualty procedure 12 times in the past two weeks, during which it had received 933 patients, 41 of whom were declared dead on arrival.

“High numbers” of patients had gunshot and shrapnel wounds, it said.

“The number of patients received over this period . . . is higher than all mass casualty incidents over the 12 months prior combined,” the ICRC said.

“An overwhelming majority of patients from the recent incidents said they had been trying to reach aid assistance distribution sites.”

Earlier this week, Gaza’s health ministry said that more than 60 people were killed in three days, after Israeli forces repeatedly opened fire on desperate Palestinians trying to reach aid sites.

Israel’s military also said at the time that its soldiers had fired towards people who had approached them in a way they deemed threatening.

Under the old UN-led system, which was the main route for deliveries to Gaza until Israel imposed its total siege in March, aid was distributed to Palestinians at multiple locations across the enclave.

Under the new system, Palestinians must travel — often for long distances on foot — to receive boxed meals from distribution hubs secured by US private security contractors and the Israeli military.

GHF said on Sunday that it had “tested” delivering directly to communities and would examine whether this would be a “viable option” for future distribution.

Israeli officials have said the new approach is meant to prevent aid from being diverted to Hamas. But UN officials said they had seen no large-scale diversion of aid, and have condemned the new system as a violation of humanitarian principles and a “fig leaf” for Israel’s attempts to force the displacement of Gaza’s population to the south of the enclave.

Last week, the UN’s human rights commissioner Volker Türk demanded an investigation into the killings of Palestinians trying to reach aid sites, and warned that “attacks directed against civilians constitute a grave breach of international law, and a war crime”.

In addition to the killings, the new system has repeatedly been hit by disruptions.

GHF said on Saturday that its sites had not handed out any aid after threats from Hamas that made it impossible to operate safely. Hamas has denied making threats.

GHF also halted aid deliveries on Friday, citing overcrowding, and suspended them entirely on Wednesday, citing “efficiency improvement work” at its sites. It said it distributed aid at three sites on Sunday.

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