

# Israeli Forces Kill 41 in Gaza Protests as Anger Mounts Over U.S. Embassy

Israeli forces killed at least 41 Palestinians along the Gaza border on Monday as angry protesters demonstrated at the frontier on the day the United States opened its embassy in Jerusalem, health officials said.

It was the highest Palestinian death toll in a single day since a series of protests dubbed the "Great March of Return" began at the border with Israel on March 30, and since the 2014 Gaza war.

The health officials said 900 Palestinians were wounded, about 450 of them by live bullets.

Tens of thousands streamed to the coastal enclave's land border on Monday, some approaching the Israeli fence – a line Israeli leaders said Palestinians would not be allowed to breach. Clouds of black smoke from tires set alight by demonstrators rose in the air.

Demonstrators, some armed with slingshots, hurled stones at the Israeli security forces, who fired volleys of tear gas and intense rounds of gunfire.

"Today is the big day when we will cross the fence and tell Israel and the world we will not accept being occupied forever," said Gaza science teacher Ali, who declined to give his last name.

"Many may get martyred today, so many, but the world will hear our message. Occupation must end," he said.

Israeli leaders and a U.S. delegation including Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and President Donald Trump's daughter

and son-in-law, Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, were due to attend the opening of the embassy, relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in a controversial decision.

“A great day for Israel,” the U.S. president, who stoked Arab anger by recognizing disputed Jerusalem as Israel’s capital in December, said in a tweet.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in lockstep with Trump over fulfilling a long-standing U.S. promise to move the embassy to the holy city and over Washington’s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal last week, echoed the sentiment.

“What a moving day for the people of Israel and the State of Israel,” Netanyahu said.

The Palestinians, who seek their own future state with its capital in East Jerusalem, have been outraged by Trump’s shift from previous administrations’ preference for keeping the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv pending progress in peace efforts.

Those talks, aimed at finding a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, have been frozen since 2014. Other international powers worry that the U.S. move could also inflame Palestinian unrest in the occupied West Bank, which Israel captured along with East Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war.

Most countries say the status of Jerusalem – a sacred city to Jews, Muslims and Christians – should be determined in a final peace settlement and that moving their embassies now would prejudice any such deal.

#### MAN IN WHEELCHAIR KILLED

The 41 Palestinian dead on Monday included a 14-year-old boy, a medic and a man in a wheelchair who had been pictured on social media using a slingshot.

The Israeli military identified three of those killed as armed

militants whom it said tried to place explosives near the fence in the southern Gaza Strip.

The latest casualties raised the Palestinian death toll to 86 since the protests started six weeks ago. No Israeli casualties have been reported.

At the protest sites, families sat in the shade of tents nearly 800 meters (yards) from the border fence. Hundreds of protesters ventured to within several hundred meters of the barrier, while others moved even closer, rolling burning tires and hurling stones.

Some flew flaming kites to try and torch bushes on the other side of the frontier and distract Israeli marksmen. Hundreds of Palestinians were treated for tear gas inhalation.

"The IDF (Israel Defence Forces) will act forcefully against any terrorist activity and will operate to prevent attacks against Israelis," the military said in a statement.

The killings have drawn international criticism, but the United States has echoed Israel in accusing Gaza's ruling Hamas movement of instigating violence, an allegation it denies.

More than 2 million people are crammed into the narrow strip, which is blockaded by Egypt and Israel

#### KUSHNER PROMOTES PEACE DEAL

In excerpts seen by Reuters of a speech he planned to deliver at the embassy inauguration ceremony, Kushner said it is possible for both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict "to gain more than they give" in any peace deal.

"Jerusalem must remain a city that brings people of all faiths together," Kushner, the U.S. envoy to the Middle East, will say at the opening.

The Trump administration has nearly completed a long-awaited Israeli-Palestinian peace plan but is still undecided on how and when to roll it out, given Palestinians' outrage over the embassy move and their contention that Washington can no longer be an honest broker.

Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, in a statement on Monday, accused the United States of "blatant violations of international law."

The protests are scheduled to culminate on Tuesday, the day Palestinians mourn as the "Nakba" or "Catastrophe" when, in 1948, hundreds of thousands of them were driven out of their homes or fled the fighting around Israel's creation.

"Choosing a tragic day in Palestinian history (to open the Jerusalem embassy) shows great insensibility and disrespect for the core principles of the peace process," Hamdallah wrote.

In London, the British government said it had no plans to move its Israel embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and said it disagreed with the U.S. decision to do so.

The Russian government said it feared the embassy move would increase tensions across the Middle East.

But Guatemala, which received support from Israel in its counter-insurgency campaigns in the 1980s, plans to open an embassy in Jerusalem on Wednesday. Paraguay intends to follow suit later this month. {eo}

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