



Continuation of Heavy fighting deteriorates life in Gaza

Gaza Strip - 15th June 2007 - "The medical center workers are not able to leave their homes. My children are too scared. We continue to hear explosions and shooting ... It is the worst fighting ever." said Dr. Bandalay El-Sayegh, Director of our Gaza Medical Center.



Fight has continued with gun battles across Gaza. (Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)

Regrettable clashes have erupted between the two factions Fatah and Hamas. Life in Gaza has almost totally stopped, and danger is everywhere as masked gunmen in many parts of Gaza control the streets. The situation is getting more and more complicated after all attempts at reaching a valid ceasefire agreement or any compromise

between the two factions failed.

Dr. El-Sayegh also said, "Automatic weapon fire and explosions haven't stopped since Monday night. We couldn't sleep in our bedrooms, but we are huddled in a hallway on the floor trying to hide from indiscriminate automatic weapons fire." Dr. El-Sayegh is one of thousands in the city who are facing danger in their homes.

Heavy fighting raged around the main Fatah headquarters in Gaza City (close to the Caritas Medical Center). Therefore, Caritas Jerusalem has temporarily suspended its activities in the Gaza Strip since the fighting has increased intensely and caused many deaths. More than 90 Palestinians were killed since last Sunday and more than 400 people have been injured in Gaza.

Due to the dangerous atmosphere surrounding the Caritas Jerusalem Gaza Medical Center as well as many other parts in Gaza, Caritas workers in the city were asked to stay in their homes this week for their safety. They will not be able to work if the security situation does not improve in the coming days.

Gaza street corners, rooftops, even hospitals have become battlegrounds with most Gazans too scared to leave their homes. Governmental and educational institutions, NGO offices as well as shops and markets have closed, but some schools are open where high school students are having their final exams, for those students who can reach the schools.

Education at a halt

All Gaza Strip universities have been suspended until the situation calms down. In most colleges, it is time for final exams. Postponing the exams negatively affects students who are trying to complete their final exams

so that they can continue on to register for university. Caritas Jerusalem met Naseem Skeik, 23 years, a Gaza resident and a senior in university. He says, "Tomorrow [Thursday], I will be having my last exam in university. I am afraid it will not take place ... If this happens, it will be a big problem for me. I want to finish my university and go to the next stage in my life."



Palestinians in the West Bank appealed stopping the fight.

Naseem is looking to leave Gaza after graduation because the current situation is not giving him any hope. He said, "I hope the fighters stop ongoing war ... If it keeps on like it is now, I prefer leaving Gaza and go to any other place in the world."

Exams are delayed at universities, but final exams for the last year of high school (called locally *Tawjihi*) are still going on despite the dangers that face students. Haya al-Tabbaa, 18, is a *Tawjihi* student. The fighting disturbs her when she studies and during the exams.

"On my way to school by a private taxi, I encounter many checkpoints so our way to school takes one hour instead of 10 minutes." Haya said. "Today in the class [where Haya is examined] we were asked to put our heads on the desks [lower than the windows] in order not to be shot." This is the life that school student's have to face now in Gaza. The threat of being killed as they take their final exams.

Haya is terrified from what is going on. She was not expecting such fighting during the time of examinations. But the worst occurred. She added, "One masked gunman stopped the taxi I was in, he obliged us to drive from another street which was not the right street to our school. After the driver of the taxi complained, he pointed his rifle at the car. The driver quickly drove away."

A rally calling for peace ends in a hail of bullets

There has been a call for a rally demanding peace in the streets of Gaza. Hundreds of intellectuals, students and civil workers marched from eastern Gaza City to the Rimal area where the fighting was at a fever pitch. They were holding only Palestinian flags and chanting slogans urging fighters to stop fighting.



Palestinian women took to the street to protest against the violence. (Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)

The protesters headed to the legislative council and then toward the security locations' zone, but they were confronted by automatic weapons fire. One youth named, Shadi al-Ejla, was killed. Shadi was a distinguished guy, as described by his friends. He died and all his dreams went away. His friend Mohamed Abu Shaban said, "Shadi was so kind and peaceful. He looked

for peace and safety in Gaza. He was holding the Palestinian flag in the rally calling fighters to stop the clashes. Shadi was killed..." Who is accused? An unknown masked gunman. The rally ended and everybody returned home, except Shadi.

In closing, we call on factions to be aware and not rely on the rule of brute force, but to seek peaceful dialogue as a way out of suffering. We hope peace comes to Gaza.

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