
Gaza Strip: Massacre at Al-Ahli Arabi Anglican hospital. WCC: “War Crimes. Massive punitive attack”

Nearly 300 people - but some sources say as many as 500 - were killed in an attack on the Al-Ahli Arabi Baptist Hospital in central Gaza City this evening, according to a spokesman for the Hamas health ministry. Many people are believed to be still under the rubble, Al Jazeera News reported from journalists on the scene. Canon **Richard Sewell**, a senior representative of the Anglican Church in Jerusalem, which funds the hospital that is completely independent of any faction in Gaza, told the BBC that the hospital was sheltering around a thousand displaced people. He said that by the end of last week some six thousand Gazans, most of them families, had taken refuge in the courtyard of the hospital, which was first hit on 14 October, injuring four people. After the latest air strike, most of the displaced people left the hospital, but a thousand people remained. Many of the wounded are women and children. **Israel's version.** In a statement reported by the BBC, a spokesperson for the **Israel Defence Forces (IDF)** promptly rejected the accusations made by Hamas: “A hospital is a highly sensitive building and is not an IDF target. The IDF is investigating the source of the explosion and as always is prioritising accuracy and reliability. We urge everyone to proceed with caution when reporting unverified claims of a terrorist organisation.” This initial communiqué was followed by another that blames the massacre entirely on an Islamic Jihad rocket. Based on “intelligence information, the blast at the Gaza hospital was caused by rockets misfired by the Islamic Jihad,” claims the IDF, adding: “From the analysis of the operational systems of the IDF, an enemy rocket barrage was carried out towards Israel, which passed through the vicinity of the hospital when it was hit.” **Reactions.** The massacre at Al-Ahli Arabi hospital came just hours before US President Joe Biden arrived in Israel. He is scheduled to travel to Amman within hours for talks with Jordan's King Abdullah, Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. The latter reportedly cancelled his meeting with Biden after the news of the Gaza hospital attack and called for three days of national mourning. The focus of the visits was an agreement with Benjamin Netanyahu's government on the delivery of humanitarian aid and safe areas for Gaza's more than 2 million residents, who are under enemy fire and in urgent need of water, food and medical assistance. Protests erupted in Amman in front of the Israeli embassy and in Ramallah against Palestinian President Abu Mazen. The hospital massacre drew strong international reactions, with the Turkish Foreign Ministry calling it a “barbaric attack.” Iran also condemned the attack as a “heinous war crime.” The Qatari Foreign Ministry said: “The expansion of the Israeli attacks on Gaza to include hospitals, schools and other populated settlements is a dangerous escalation.” For Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, “the news coming out of Gaza is appalling and absolutely unacceptable... international law must be respected in this and all cases. There are rules about war and it is not acceptable to hit a hospital.” Egypt and Jordan condemned the attack “in the strongest terms.” Russia and the United Arab Emirates called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on the morning of October 18. The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, said the attack was “not in line with international law.” On the same subject, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, declined to comment pending “confirmation.” **The Churches' reactions.** From London, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has condemned the “appalling loss of innocent lives”, referring to the massacre that took place in Gaza last night at the al-Ahli Arab Hospital. In a statement on X sent to SIR by Lambeth Palace, the Archbishop writes: “The Ahli Hospital is run by the Anglican Church. I mourn with our brothers and sisters - please pray for them. I renew my appeal for civilians to be protected in this devastating war. May the Lord have mercy.” Local and British media have reported hundreds of deaths and casualties. This morning at Lambeth Palace - the heart of the Anglican Communion - the Imam of Leicester, Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra, and the Rabbi of the New North London Synagogue, Jonathan Wittenberg, joined the Archbishop of Canterbury in a prayer for peace. “We cannot allow the seeds of hatred and prejudice

to be sown again in our communities,” said Welby. The **World Council of Churches (WCC)** expressed “outrage and shock” at news of the attack on the Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza. “Thousands of Palestinians who had lost their homes already were taking refuge at the hospital, run by the Anglican Church,” said WCC general secretary Rev. **Jerry Pillay**. “The attack amounts to collective punishment, which is a war crime under International Law.” In a statement submitted to SIR, Pillay added that “the international community must hold Israel accountable for the crimes committed against civilians.” “The attack -continues the general secretary - stands also contrary to everything our monotheistic values demand from us; namely to stand up for justice, make peace, and protect the human dignity of all those created by God and in His image. The attack makes no sense, since it was directed against a hospital, church property, patients, and families who were seeking refuge from relentless bombardment by Israel.” Pillay points out that the attack came on the same day when church leaders in Jerusalem organized a day of prayer for peace. “As president of the United States Joe Biden is scheduled to visit Israel, we call upon him to condemn this heinous attack against the hospital, and to ask the Government of Israel to stop the violent bombardment of Gaza and to open a humanitarian corridor”, Pillay said. “At this moment of pain, we pray that those killed at the Al-Ahli Hospital, and all those who lost their lives in this conflict, may rest in peace” – he concluded. “We send our condolences to the bereaved families, and best wishes for a speedy recovery to those who were injured.” **The Christians of Gaza**. News of the massacre at the Anglican hospital caused “consternation” among Gaza's small Christian community, mostly refugees in the Holy Family Catholic parish. Sister **Nabila Saleh** voiced the feelings of local Christians to SIR: “At this moment I cannot help but think of the suffering of the people affected. Billions are spent on missiles and weapons, while people in the world are dying of hunger and thirst. The so-called democratic countries are talking about human rights, but these rights only exist on paper. Our land drips with blood. We have nowhere to go for peace. We have no one, only You. In You we place our hope and our justice.”

M. Chiara Biagioni