
Gaza Strip. Sister Saleh: “Only the Pope hears us”

“The Israeli troops have reached as far as Tel al-Hawa, the neighbourhood in which our school is located. The Israelis have issued an order to evacuate all the houses in the area, including our school. Let's hope they don't bomb us.” The words of Sister **Nabila Saleh** to SIR confirm the information previously announced by the Chief of Staff of the Israeli army, General **Herzi Halevi**: “The troops are inside the city of Gaza, which they have encircled on three sides.” “Israeli troops have passed the outskirts of Gaza City. We are advancing despite painful losses,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quoted as saying by local media. The death toll of Israeli soldiers killed in the fighting has risen to 23, while at least 130 Hamas terrorists have been killed in the last few hours. Among them was Mustafa Dalul, the commander of the Sabra Tel al-Hawa Battalion who played “a large role in Hamas's fight against IDF troops in the Gaza Strip” since the outbreak of the war. According to the Hamas Ministry of Health, which does not distinguish between civilians and militia fighters, the death toll in Gaza has reached 9,061, including 3,760 minors, while the number of wounded is estimated at around 32,000.



It was late yesterday evening when we last heard from Sister Nabila. “Internet connections are down for most of the day”, the nun told SIR, “the same goes for electricity”, she said, expressing her concern. Before the war, she ran the school of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the largest in the Strip with over 1,200 pupils, the vast majority of whom are Muslim. “The parish of the Holy Family, where we are now sheltering,” she explains, “is no more than a five-minute drive from Tel al-Hawa. Yesterday, while we were praying in the church, we heard a loud explosion on the other side of the road, near the entrance to the parish. Thank God there was no damage or casualties, only great fear among the 700 people inside the church compound. The situation is getting worse by the day”, Sister Saleh points out: “Nobody leaves the parish anymore because the bombs keep falling. Every time the children who are here with us hear rockets and bombs, they begin to despair and start to cry.” “A few days ago,” the nun added, “they also bombed the cultural centre of the Greek Orthodox community, destroying the auditorium. There is not a single decent place left standing in Gaza.” No one speaks out about it, but the greatest fear - as Israeli ground troops close in - is being caught up in fierce house-to-house fighting. The nuns who assist the parish priest, **Father Yusuf**, do their best to care for severely disabled children, the sick, the wounded and the elderly. “We also try to entertain and cheer up the other children who spend their days terrified by the bombs,” explains Sister Nabila. “At the moment, we are managing to meet their needs for food and water, but we don't know for how much longer.”

“We trust in Divine Providence and continue to pray every day.



.” Father Yusuf informs him of the situation. Yesterday I had the opportunity to speak to him myself. He reassured and comforted us, telling us that he was aware of our suffering and that he was praying for us. At the end of each conversation, he blesses us all. Only the Pope listens to our voice, the voice of the victims, of those who are suffering from this unbearable and absurd war.” **Diplomacy and humanitarian aid.** US Secretary of State **Antony Blinken** will arrive in Tel Aviv today for his third visit to Israel since the start of the war. According to the White House, the purpose of his visit is to urge the Israeli government to accept a "temporary and localised" pause in the fighting in Gaza and to discuss ways to minimise the suffering of Gaza's civilian population. The US also reaffirmed its 'firm resolve' to prevent an escalation of the conflict in the region. Turkey, according to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is also working towards "a ceasefire and a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians". The delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza continues at a slow pace. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent, 374 trucks of aid have entered Gaza since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas. The aid did not include fuel. This is a drop in the ocean compared to the needs of the people of Gaza, who have seen 45 per cent of their homes destroyed or damaged by Israeli attacks. In recent days, bakeries and ovens have been raided by crowds of Gazawi residents in need of food. Finally, the evacuation operations at Egypt's Rafah crossing continue, with more than 800 people evacuated so far (including 74 US citizens) and now including Italians.

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