

## Gaza deadliest conflict ever for journos Says UN expert

AFP, Geneva

A UN expert accused Israel Monday of intentionally targeting journalists in a bid to cover up "genocide", warning that the war raging there was the deadliest ever for media workers.

"The way in which journalists are being killed, silenced ... is the cover-up of genocide," Irene Khan, the special rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, told reporters in Geneva.

She said the latest United Nations figure showed that at least 252 Palestinian journalists have been killed in Gaza since Israel's war began on October 7, 2023.

That makes it "the deadliest conflict ever for journalists", Khan said, warning that the number "is of course likely to go up, because every week we hear news of more killings".

Already, "more journalists have been killed in Gaza than in both World



Wars, Vietnam War, wars in Yugoslavia and the war in Afghanistan combined", she said.

By comparison, she said 14 journalists had been killed in Ukraine since Russia began its full scale invasion in early 2022, while the number of journalists killed over two decades of conflict in Afghanistan was in "the dozens".

The expert slammed Israeli "smear campaigns", accusing many of the journalists killed in its strikes of being "terrorist supporters or terrorists themselves" in a bid to "delegitimise and discredit" them and their work.

"So it is not just killing journalists, but (an) attempt is being very clearly made here to kill the story," she charged.

Khan also voiced outrage that Israel has continued to block all access to Gaza for international journalists.

"What is happening in Gaza is extremely unusual," she said. "I cannot recall another situation where a member state of the United Nations has denied access to independent international media for a conflict."

She said a "terrible precedent" is being set for media freedom and demanded international action.

"States must stop Israel before all journalists in Gaza are silenced."



Displaced Palestinians move with their belongings southwards on a road in the Nuseirat refugee camp area in the central Gaza Strip following renewed Israeli evacuation orders for Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'We pulled children out in pieces'

Witnesses tell tales of horror as Israel pummels Gaza City

AFP, Gaza City

As drones buzzed overhead in the morning sun, Palestinians gently lifted from the rubble a blanket holding a body, the latest casualty of Israel's relentless bombardment of Gaza City.

The devastating scene is a familiar one in the Gaza Strip's main urban hub, where Israel has carried out intensifying strikes in the runup to the ground assault it launched yesterday.

Overnight bombing reduced a residential block in the north of the city to mounds of rubble. One man squeezed his head and hand beneath a concrete slab in a desperate search for survivors.

"There were about 50 people inside, including women and children. I don't know why they bombed it," said Abu Abd Zagout, adding that it had housed his uncle's family.

"Why kill children sleeping safely like that, turning them into body parts?" he added.

"We pulled the children out in pieces."

A sea of destruction surrounded the site of the strike, with those aiding the rescue effort dwarfed by mounds of crushed concrete and metal.

One family attempted to load belongings into a car parked on a barely usable debris-strewn road nearby.

"At night they bombed an entire quarter, three houses and the neighbouring houses," said Gaza City resident Mohammed



Al Bardawil.

"All of (the dead) are children, elderly people and women. They are all under the rubble."

Gaza's civil defence agency said at least 12 people, including children, were killed in the strike, with "a large number of civilians" missing under the rubble.

When contacted by AFP, the Israeli military said it would try to look into the report.

Media restrictions in the territory and difficulties in accessing many areas mean AFP is unable to independently verify the details and tolls provided by the civil defence agency or the Israeli military.

Israel yesterday said it had launched its ground assault on Gaza City, where it said its troops were moving deeper into the

centre.

The United Nations recently estimated nearly one million people lived in Gaza City and its surroundings, from where Israel has repeatedly warned people to evacuate southwards.

An Israeli military official estimated more than 350,000 people had fled the city ahead of the ground offensive.

Ibrahim Al-Besheiti, a 35-year-old resident of Gaza City's Al-Sabra neighbourhood told AFP the situation was "already catastrophic".

"The sound of aircraft never stops -- quadcopters and warplanes constantly fill the sky. We're extremely afraid, and many people around us have already fled. We don't know what will happen to us," he said.

## KILLING OF CHARLIE KIRK White House vows to fight left-wing 'terror' movement

AFP, Washington

Senior White House official Stephen Miller vowed Monday that the Trump administration would dismantle an alleged "vast domestic terror movement" that he linked to the killing of right-wing activist Charlie Kirk.

Miller, the White House deputy chief of staff, made the comments on Kirk's podcast, which Vice President JD Vance hosted on Monday.

"We are going to channel all of the anger that we have over the organised campaign that led to this assassination, to uproot and dismantle these terrorist networks," said Miller. Miller and Vance both alleged the existence of a rising left-wing extremism movement, which they said the administration would now target.

"We are going to use every resource we have at the Department of Justice, Homeland Security and throughout this government to identify, disrupt, dismantle and destroy these networks and make America safe again for the American people," said Miller.

The remarks have sparked alarm among some Trump critics that such a campaign could be used to quash dissent. While Kirk was a vocal conservative, the United States has seen violence targeting members of both political parties in recent years, amid a sharp rise in polarisation and easy access to firearms.

Kirk, a close ally of Trump, was shot Wednesday during a speaking event on a Utah university campus. He was the founder of the influential conservative youth political group Turning Point USA.



Damaged buildings are pictured along the swollen Tamsa river after a cloudburst following heavy rains in the Sahastradhara region of Dehradun, in India's Uttarakhand state yesterday.

## Spain cancels key Israel arms deal Says will boycott Eurovision if Israel takes part

AFP, Madrid

The Spanish government has cancelled a contract worth nearly 700 million euros (\$825 million) for Israeli-designed rocket launchers, according to an official document seen Monday by AFP.

The move comes after Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced last week that his government would "consolidate in law" a ban on military equipment sales or purchases with Israel over its offensive in Gaza.

The contract, awarded to a consortium of Spanish companies, involved the purchase of 12 SILAM rocket launcher systems derived from the PULS platform made by Israeli firm Elbit Systems, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies' Military Balance.

First reported by local media and the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, the cancellation was formalised on Spain's official public contracts platform on September 9.

Spain will also boycott next year's Eurovision Song Contest if Israel takes part, public broadcaster RTVE said yesterday. While other European nations have threatened to pull out of the contest, Spain is the first of the so-called "big five" nations which provide the most funding for the event to do so.

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the organiser of Eurovision, is set to decide whether Israel will take part in the 2026 edition at its general assembly in December.

## Ozone layer 'healing': UN

AFP, Geneva

The Earth's protective ozone layer is healing and the hole should fully disappear in coming decades, the UN said yesterday, hailing the success of concerted international action.

A fresh report from the UN's World Meteorological Organization highlighted that the ozone hole over the Antarctic was smaller in 2024 than in recent years, in what it said was "welcome scientific news for people's and planetary health".

"Today, the ozone layer is healing," UN chief Antonio Guterres said in the statement.

"This achievement reminds us that when nations heed the warnings of science, progress is possible."

The WMO said as it published its Ozone Bulletin 2024 that the declined depletion "was partially due to naturally occurring atmospheric factors which drive year-to-year fluctuations". But, it stressed that the long-term positive trend witnessed "reflects the success of concerted international action".

The bulletin was issued to mark World Ozone Day and the 40th anniversary of the Vienna Convention, which first recognised stratospheric ozone depletion as a global problem.

That 1975 convention was followed by the Montreal Protocol, signed in 1987, which aimed to phase out ozone-depleting substances found primarily in refrigeration, air conditioning and aerosol sprays.

To date, that agreement has led to the phase-out of over 99 percent of the production and consumption of controlled ozone-depleting substances, the WMO said.

"As a result, the ozone layer is now on track to recover to 1980s levels by the middle of this century, significantly reducing risks of skin cancer, cataracts, and ecosystem damage due to excessive UV exposure," it said.

## Trump may meet Zelensky next week

AFP, Tel Aviv

President Donald Trump will likely meet Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky next week and still hopes to broker a peace deal between Kyiv and Moscow, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said yesterday.

Trump has repeatedly threatened sanctions against Russia if President Vladimir Putin does not compromise. But he has not followed through even as Russia ramps up attacks, frustrating Ukraine.

Trump has had "multiple calls with Putin, multiple meetings with Zelensky, including probably next week again in New York", where leaders will gather for the UN General Assembly, Rubio told reporters in Israel.

"He's going to keep trying. If peace is possible, he wants to achieve it," Rubio said. "At some point the president may conclude it's not possible. He's not there yet, but he could get to that point."