

Newsletter Thursday August 9, 2018

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| As 180 rockets pound Israel, IAF hits scores of Gaza targets

Thai farm worker seriously hurt in Israeli town • Three killed in Gaza • Palestinian official says Hamas willing to end violence if Israel reciprocates, says rocket fire a response for Israeli "crimes" • Spike in violence comes amid cease-fire efforts.

Lilach Shoval, Gadi Golan, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

An Israeli airstrike in Gaza early Thursday | Photo: Reuters

Israeli jets bombed dozens of targets in the Gaza Strip as Palestinian terrorists fired more than 180 rockets and mortar shells into Israel in a fierce burst of violence overnight Wednesday and well into Thursday, despite efforts to broker a truce to end months of simmering violence.

A Thai farm worker in her 20s sustained moderate to serious injuries in Israel's Eshkol Regional Council when a rocket struck a packing facility there Thursday morning. Another employee was lightly hurt and at least 20 others were wounded in separate incidents.

The Soroka Medical Center in Beersheba issued a statement Thursday saying, "The woman's condition has improved, she is conscious and breathing independently. She is still hospitalized in the ICU. The other victim from the same incident has been released."

Three people were reported killed in the Gaza Strip: a member of Hamas, the Islamist terrorist group that rules Gaza, as well as a pregnant woman and her 18-month-old child. At least five civilians were wounded, local medical officials said.

Most of the rockets fired into Israel struck in open and unpopulated areas, with only a fraction hitting communities along the Gaza border. Six projectiles exploded in the southern Israeli city of Sderot and one rocket directly hit a home in the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council.

Israel's Iron Dome rocket defense system intercepted some 30 projectiles headed for populated areas.

A Palestinian official said on Thursday that armed groups in Gaza would stop the latest round of fighting with Israel if Israel ceased its attacks on the enclave.

Speaking at a joint command center in Gaza, the official said the territory's militant groups had been "responding to crimes" committed by Israel - a reference to Tuesday's IDF tank shelling that killed two Hamas gunmen.

"Factions of the resistance consider this round of escalation over as far as we are concerned, and the continuation of calm depends on the behavior of the occupation," the official said, using militant factions' term for Israel.

The Israeli military declined to comment on the official's remarks.

The flare-up comes as Egypt is trying to broker a long-term cease-fire between the two sides.

The latest fighting has stayed within familiar parameters. The rocket fire from Gaza has not targeted Israel's heartland and the Israeli military said its airstrikes were limited to Hamas installations.

Likud minister Yuval Steinitz, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's inner cabinet, told Israel Radio before the Palestinian official's comments that Israel was "not eager to enter a war" but would make no concessions to Hamas.

Kulanu minister Yoav Gallant remarked that "whatever is needed to be done to defend our civilians and soldiers will be done, no matter the price in Gaza."

Netanyahu was due to hold a security cabinet meeting later in the day after consultations with security officials.

Rocket warning sirens sounded almost nonstop in the southern Israeli town of Sderot and other border communities from sunset on Wednesday. Many residents have reinforced rooms in their homes where they can take shelter.

Ambulance sirens echoed through the night in Gaza, where families huddled at home as powerful explosions shook buildings. The Israeli military said its aircraft struck more than 150 facilities belonging to Hamas.

U.N. Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov said in an overnight statement: "I am deeply alarmed by the recent escalation of violence between Gaza and Israel, and particularly by today's multiple rockets fired towards communities in southern Israel."

He said the United Nation has engaged with Egypt in an "unprecedented effort" to avoid serious conflict, but cautioned that "the situation can rapidly deteriorate with devastating consequences for all people."

Gaza has been controlled by Hamas for more than a decade, during which time it has fought three wars against Israel, the latest in 2014.

