

'Should we grieve, rejoice or cry?': Palestinians in Gaza react to ceasefire

Celebrations break out across the territory but many are worried the deal will break down and war will resume

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Crowds of Palestinians filled the ruined streets and gathered in tented encampments throughout Sunday to celebrate [the ceasefire that came into effect at 9.15am GMT](#), ending 15 months of devastating war that has killed tens of thousands there and laid waste swaths of the territory.

"I feel very beautiful. We hope that God will complete this joy and that we return to our homes and lands safely. This is the most beautiful joy in the world, thank God," said Moaz Qirqiz, 46.

From early morning there had been celebration. In the southern city of Khan Younis there was cheering, whistling and fusillades in the air. The streets filled with young people screaming, jumping and dancing as their elders distributed sweets.

“The most beautiful moment will be when we meet the loved ones in north [Gaza](#) and when we stand on the soil of our land and our homes even if they were destroyed. These minutes, I feel that I am the happiest person in the world, even though I lost my closest brother and lost my home and all the homes of my family,” said Qirqiz, who has been living with his family near the central town of Deir al-Balah after being displaced early in the conflict from his home in northern Gaza.

Like many others, Qirqiz, who ran an electrical appliance store in the northern town of Jabaliya, where there have been intensive recent bombardments and clashes, said he was worried the ceasefire would break down.

“I am afraid that things will turn upside down and that we will return to what we

were like during the war and return to the suffering of loss and destruction once again," he said.

Jamal Zaki Murad, 69, was more hopeful. "I am very optimistic about the agreement and hope we can return to living like other people," he said. "We have had enough suffering and loss. We have lost so much time, time that has passed from our lives. I lost everything in this war – my granddaughter, part of my family, and my home. Nothing remains."

The last hours in Gaza before the ceasefire between Hamas and [Israel](#) came into effect resembled the preceding 15 months of war: full of fear, anxiety and violence. What was new was the hope that an end to the suffering was near.

In shattered Gaza City, groups waved the Palestinian flag and filmed the jubilant scenes on their mobile phones as carts loaded with household possessions moved slowly down a thoroughfare scattered with rubble and debris.

Internally displaced Palestinians inspect their destroyed homes in Rafah.

Photograph: Haitham Imad/EPA

Israeli strikes continued up to and beyond the initial deadline for the start of the ceasefire after Hamas was late in providing the names of the [three hostages it would release later on Sunday](#) in exchange for scores of Palestinian prisoners. Gaza's health ministry said several people were killed early on Sunday in the north of the territory.

The war has killed more than 46,900 Palestinians, according to local health authorities. An estimated 12,000 are buried under rubble, humanitarian workers in Gaza said. More than 100,000 are thought to have been injured.

The conflict has led to the repeated displacement of most of the prewar 2.3 million population of Gaza.

Umm Abdullah, 40, who has been living in a tented encampment on the coast near al-Mawasi for months, said she had been too anxious to sleep.

"I was counting the hours and minutes, but at the same time I put my hand on

my heart for fear that we would die in the last minutes of the war. So everyone stayed in their tents until the ceasefire is done. Now the atmosphere is like [during the Muslim festival of] Eid.”

Displaced Palestinians on their way to their homes in Rafah. Photograph: Haitham Imad/EPA

Thaer al-Masri, 41, from Beit Lahia, said he could not describe his feelings.

“Should we grieve, rejoice, or cry over what has happened? The only real emotion we feel is pain and loss – the loss of our home, our friends, and our city.”

Umm Abdullah said: “I do not see any victory in this war. Our only victory is to get out of it safely. We lost a lot of people and relatives. I lost 12 members of my family. My sister and her entire family, her youngest daughter was only eight days old. My biggest fear is that the deal will fail.”

[The deal](#), agreed after a year of intensive mediation by the US, Qatar and Egypt, sets in motion a long and uncertain process. Negotiations on the far more

difficult second phase of the ceasefire should begin in just over two weeks.

A small convoy of armed Hamas fighters drove through Khan Younis, far outnumbered by crowds who cheered and chanted. Hamas policemen, dressed in blue police uniform, were also deployed in some areas, after months of trying to keep out of sight to avoid Israeli strikes.

The Israeli army warned Gaza residents early on Sunday not to approach its forces or Israeli territory. The [UN fears chaotic scenes](#) as huge numbers try to reach their former homes.

The army's spokesperson, Avichay Adraee, said on Telegram: "We urge you not to head towards the buffer zone or IDF forces for your safety.

"At this stage, heading towards the buffer zone or moving from south to north via Gaza Valley puts you at risk."

Long lines of trucks carrying fuel and aid supplies queued up at border crossings in the hours before the ceasefire was due to take effect. The World Food

Programme said they began to cross on Sunday morning.

Truck drivers transporting humanitarian aid at the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Photograph: Amr Nabil/AP

The deal requires 600 truckloads of aid to be allowed into Gaza every day of the initial six-week ceasefire, including 50 carrying fuel. Half of the supplies are to be sent to the territory's north, where experts have said famine is imminent.

Major unresolved questions now loom over Gaza's future. Reconstruction – if the ceasefire reaches its final phase – [may take 30 to 50 years](#), according to some estimates. There is still no agreement on who will govern Gaza after the war.

Tented camps now stretch across what were once beaches and fields. Almost all the territory's basic infrastructure – power cables, sewers, water pipes – has been destroyed along with much of its healthcare system. Aid workers describe some former busy cities as “moonscapes”.

Jana Mahmoud Halles, nine, said he was happy to escape injury or death and that no one in his close family had been harmed.

“Now, we feel reassured. We will sleep and wake up in peace finally ... After the war, I hope to continue my education at school so I can become a doctor in the future and help the sick and injured.”

The war began after Hamas militants stormed Israeli towns and villages on 7 October 2023, killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and capturing more than 250 hostages.