

Israeli Occupation Forces' Assault on Places of Worship in Gaza

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The machine of destruction and havoc belonging to the Israeli occupation army has not ceased in the past days from bombarding and destroying places of worship in the Gaza Strip, especially targeting dozens of mosques with missiles of significant destructive power. The spokesperson for the Ministry of Waqf in Gaza, Adel al-Hour, affirmed that targeting places of worship, especially mosques, which contradicts all international laws, is "part of the aggressive and criminal behaviour of the enemy towards our people, expressing the ethical nature that the occupation lives and enforces in the field." He explained that "the Israeli enemy, by its nature, targets civilian citizens and public facilities and vital places such as hospitals, and among these targets, it bombs places of worship in the Gaza Strip."

Al-Hour warned that "there is no place in the Strip safe from the malice of this arrogant enemy, which has found no deterrent from countries claiming to stand for human rights, citizenship rights, freedom, and freedom of worship, which they constantly advocate."

Israeli airstrikes bombed the minaret of the Grand Al-Omari Mosque, one of the prominent historical mosques in Palestine with a history dating back over 14 centuries.

MP Mustafa Bakri commented, saying: "Israeli Zionist occupation planes destroy the minaret of the Grand Al-Omari Mosque, which has a history of 1400 years. This is a new crime by the Zionist enemy seeking to control geography, erase people and history, amid Western American support where there are no longer any prohibitions."

In turn, the head of the Christian National Assembly in the Holy Land, Dimitri Deliani, confirmed that "the occupation deliberately targets the shelters where the citizens in Gaza seek refuge during the genocide war carried out by the occupation government". He explained that "targeting various churches and their affiliated institutions is the implementation of threats issued by the occupation at the beginning of its genocidal war on Gaza." Deliani warned that churches, through official statements issued by "patriarchs and heads of churches in Jerusalem," have declared their "absolute rejection of complying with Israeli threats, insisting on their ethical role, and affirming that churches will remain open to those who seek refuge in them." He added, "In the implementation of Israeli threats and the refusal of churches to comply with them, the Israeli occupation forces bombed the compound of the Church of Saint Porphyrius, the Orthodox church considered the third oldest church in the world, built between 402 and 407 AD, in Gaza City. Prior to that, by 48 hours, they targeted the Baptist hospital and systematically destroyed every church institution that could shelter those who seek refuge."

Churches in the Gaza Strip were not spared from the occupation's missiles, as a horrific massacre was committed against displaced citizens in the Orthodox Roman Church in central Gaza, resulting in the martyrdom and injury of dozens of Muslims and Christians who were present in the church. According to data announced by the government media office in the Gaza Strip, 76 mosques were completely destroyed in the Israeli occupation attacks, and 165 mosques were partially damaged.



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In addition, 3 historical churches were damaged in various areas of the Gaza Strip. The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor stated that Israel's targeting of places of worship violates a fundamental right enshrined in international human rights law, namely the right to freedom of religion and belief and the non-interference in their places of worship according to this right.

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that "everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching."

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor documented cases of killing and injuries to dozens of Palestinians during Israel's attacks on mosques, as happened in the Shati refugee camp in Gaza City when the mosque of "Ahmed Yassin" was destroyed, and in the town of Beit Lahia in the north of the Strip when the mosque of "Saleem Abu Muslim" was destroyed, and in Khan Yunis when the mosque of "Khalid ibn al-Walid" was destroyed. The Euro-Mediterranean Monitor warned that Israel's repeated targeting of places of worship in its current war and its previous wars in Gaza is linked to repeated incitement by Israeli official officials who have consistently linked the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to religious dimensions, using religious symbols and texts to incite attacks on Palestinians and deprive them of their rights.

The Euro-Mediterranean Monitor emphasized that international laws and conventions prohibit targeting places of worship in wars and fall within the framework of promoting the increasingly prevalent language of religious hatred, fuelled by the current Israeli extreme right-wing government, which provides cover for escaping punishment for attacks against Palestinians. The Euro-Mediterranean Monitor called on the United Nations and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to fulfil their responsibilities in protecting places of worship and sacred sites in the Gaza Strip and the rest of the Palestinian territories, and to hold Israel accountable for its indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilians and civilian objects, considering it constitutes war crimes.