

The destruction of Gaza graves and theft of bodies is a new war crime in the occupation's record

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<https://pcomalaysia.org/>



admin@pcomalaysia.org





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According to international law, the intentional attack on a cemetery can amount to a war crime, and what Israel is doing goes beyond all international norms and laws. The Israeli occupation forces have deliberately desecrated the graves of Palestinian martyrs in the Gaza Strip since the start of the ground operation in the area. They excavate graves to extract bodies and, in some cases, steal the remains.

The Israeli occupation army acknowledged, last Friday, the destruction of a cemetery in Khan Yunis city in the southern Gaza Strip, including the excavation of graves, under the pretext of searching for the bodies of Israeli captives.

In a written statement from the Israeli occupation army in response to a question from an Anadolu Agency correspondent on the subject, the occupation stated, “As part of vital intelligence and operational information, the Israeli army carries out operations to rescue the bodies of hostages in sensitive and specific locations based on information indicating the possibility of finding the bodies of hostages there.” The statement added that the bodies found in the graves “turned out not to be those of Israeli captives, and therefore, they were respectfully returned to the graves,” according to their claim.

This is the first time the Israeli army has acknowledged the extraction of bodies, following the widespread circulation of numerous reports on social media showing the aftermath of the destruction caused by the occupation forces in several cemeteries. These reports documented the theft of bodies, leaving exposed human remains.

Examples of graves destroyed by the occupation are numerous. The withdrawal of Israeli occupation military vehicles from the vicinity of the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip revealed the occupation's destruction of a cemetery in the city and the excavation of several graves. The cemetery had previously been subjected to intense shelling by Israeli artillery and warplanes, resulting in the destruction of hundreds of graves.

In the Shuja'iya neighborhood in Gaza City, the Israeli occupation forces destroyed a part of the Tunisian Cemetery to establish a temporary military site. Additionally, the Israeli army established a military site over a cemetery in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip – another one of the oldest cemeteries in Gaza, covering an area of approximately 20 square meters.



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Stealing 150 Bodies

The occupation also destroyed the Tuffah Cemetery east of Gaza. The Government Media Office in the Gaza Strip confirmed that the occupation army excavated 1,100 graves in the cemetery and stole 150 bodies. It stated that the occupation's vehicles bulldozed the Tuffah Cemetery, extracting the bodies of martyrs and the deceased, “disrespecting and violating their dignity, without any regard for the sanctity of the deceased or the graves.”

Images of Al Jazeera showed the traces of excavation left by the occupation forces in the Tuffah Cemetery. The pictures reveal the occupation forces' mechanical excavation of the cemetery, digging up graves, and extracting bodies.

An Al Jazeera correspondent reported that the occupation forces bulldozed the cemetery, leaving the bodies of martyrs outside, in addition to running over the corpses with their vehicles and leaving them outside the graves.

The American newspaper “The New York Times” verified the destruction by the occupation of several other cemeteries, including one in Sheikh Ajleen, a neighborhood in Gaza City, and a cemetery in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip, covering an estimated area of 23 square meters.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) also verified the destruction of other cemeteries by the occupation army, including the Faluja Cemetery near the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza and the Shuja'iyah Cemetery located in the northern Gaza Strip.

An investigation conducted by CNN revealed that the Israeli occupation army “desecrated at least 16 cemeteries in its ground assault on Gaza, leading to the destruction of tombstones, overturning of soil, and, in some cases, the extraction of bodies.”

According to international law, the intentional destruction of religious sites, such as cemeteries, violates international law and can amount to a war crime unless there are narrow circumstances related to making the site a military target. Legal experts mentioned to CNN that Israel's actions could rise to the level of war crimes.