

Beat: Local

Israel and Hamas agree to 72-hour humanitarian truce

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USPA News - Israel and Hamas have agreed to a 72-hour humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip starting early Friday morning, allowing emergency work and repairs to take place while representatives of both sides negotiate an extended ceasefire, officials announced late Thursday. The ceasefire will commence at 8 a.m. local time on Friday and will last for a period of 72 hours, though all forces already on the ground will remain in place, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a joint statement.

Israel and Hamas confirmed a ceasefire had been agreed to. "We urge all parties to act with restraint until this humanitarian ceasefire begins, and to fully abide by their commitments during the ceasefire," Ban and Kerry said in the statement. "Israeli and Palestinian delegations will immediately be going to Cairo for negotiations with the Government of Egypt, aimed at reaching a durable ceasefire. The parties will be able to raise all issues of concern in these negotiations." Ban and Kerry described the ceasefire - which is the longest to date since the start of the current operation - as critical, saying it gives civilians a much-needed reprieve from violence. "During this period, civilians in Gaza will receive urgently needed humanitarian relief, and the opportunity to carry out vital functions, including burying the dead, taking care of the injured, and restocking food supplies," they said, adding that repairs on water and energy infrastructure will also take place. At least 1,437 people have been killed and more than 8,300 others have been injured in Gaza, which is home to 1.8 million people, since Israel launched its military offensive on July 8. More than 170,000 people have fled to UN-run facilities after being displaced from their homes, but several UN facilities have also been targeted. At least 59 people have been killed in Israel, nearly all of them soldiers. Since the current crisis began, the international community has repeatedly urged Israel and Hamas to return to the truce agreed to in November 2012, but several ceasefires have failed to produce results. The Egyptian-brokered truce in 2012 brought to an end 8 days of fierce cross-border fighting, which killed at least 174 Palestinians and 6 Israelis. Hundreds more were injured.

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UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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