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Israeli army defiles hundreds of graves in the Gaza Strip, steals dead bodies



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Israel-Palestinian Territory

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Geneva – Israel's army has attacked at least 12 cemeteries in the Gaza Strip by deliberately bulldozing and desecrating hundreds of graves and

stealing dozens of bodies from them as part of its genocidal war on Palestinians in the Strip, which started on 7 October 2023, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor said in a statement.

According to preliminary testimony gathered by Euro-Med Monitor, multiple Gaza Strip cemeteries have been targeted by the Israeli army. One such cemetery, Al-Batsh, was targeted on Friday 5 January. It was subjected to extensive levelling operations that included digging up graves and tearing apart some shrouded corpses.

The cemetery had initially been established on 22 October 2023 to bury dozens of unidentified dead individuals who were left in the Shifa Medical Complex for days, local residents told the Geneva-based rights group. Residents explained that Al-Batsh Cemetery had then received a large number of dead people due to the inability of victims' families to reach the eastern areas of Gaza City and bury their loved ones in the main cemeteries there.

During the Israeli army's raid last week, Al-Batsh Cemetery was entirely levelled, and its graves were dug up to the extent that the majority of the bodies were removed, dismembered, and looted, along with some of the tombstones that identified the people buried there.

Nour Nasser, a Gaza City resident who was forced to move to the south of the Gaza Strip, said that her brother Muhammad, who was in his 20s, had been

killed and buried in Al-Batsh Cemetery. Her family was shocked to learn that the cemetery had been bulldozed and that her brother's remains had vanished. "The Israeli army not only killed my brother, but also went so far as to deny my family any opportunity to visit his grave," Nasser stated.

In a separate incident, the Israeli army stormed Al-Tuffah neighbourhood's cemetery, east of Gaza City, and dug up more than 1,000 graves, removing over 150 freshly buried dead bodies from the cemetery.

Euro-Med Monitor also received several testimonies on 25 December 2023 that said the Israeli army bulldozed the Beit Hanoun Cemetery in the northern Gaza Strip and defaced its graves. Beit Hanoun resident Muhammad Abu Awad told the Euro-Med Monitor team that the Israeli army's invasion of the cemetery had resulted in its graves being destroyed by military vehicles and the cemetery ultimately being demolished completely.

Abu Awad reported that they saw the Israeli army excavating certain graves within the cemetery and removing the bodies of the recently buried; in the end, the remaining bodies were mixed up due to the bulldozing and excavation activities, making it impossible to identify any of the corpses.

During a raid on the Sheikh Shaaban Cemetery in Gaza City's Palestine Square neighbourhood from 17 to 20 December 2023, the Israeli army destroyed

scores of graves and trampled over the dead bodies, said Euro-Med Monitor.

The Euro-Med Monitor team also reported massive destruction on 20 December in a cemetery situated approximately 1.7 kilometres east of the central area of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. The Israeli bulldozing operations involved the destruction of graves across an area of approximately 2,500 square metres. At the beginning of the same month, the Israeli army also raided Al-Fallujah Cemetery in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip, vandalising graves and gravestones and stealing multiple bodies.

According to Euro-Med Monitor field documentation, the Israeli army has targeted the majority of the cemeteries in the Gaza Strip, including Al-Fallujah cemetery in the northern Gaza Strip; Ali bin Marwan; Sheikh Radwan; Al-Shuhada; and Sheikh Shaaban Cemetery; in addition to the St. Porphyrius Church Cemetery in Gaza City and Al-Shuhada Cemetery in the northern town of Beit Lahia; destroying dozens of graves in total disregard for the sanctity of the dead. Large holes have been created in these cemeteries as a result of frequent Israeli attacks, engulfing dozens of graves, and the remains of some dead bodies have been scattered or have disappeared. Dozens of graves are seriously damaged.

Euro-Med Monitor said that mass graves have been randomly established across the Gaza Strip to bury those killed in Israel's ongoing genocide of Palestinians in the Strip, given the difficulty of

accessing the main and regular cemeteries amid the non-stop Israeli attacks. Families in the Gaza Strip have resorted to creating random mass graves in residential neighbourhoods, courtyards, roads, wedding halls, and stadiums. More than 120 random mass graves have been established so far, the human rights group confirmed.

Given the abhorrent and unjustifiable international complicity, Euro-Med Monitor emphasised that Israel has not spared even the dead in its genocidal war on Gazans. Israel systematically violates the sanctity of the dead and of cemeteries, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor said, in flagrant violation of the principles of international humanitarian law and the rules of war in relation to the protection of cemeteries during armed conflicts, including the Hague Conventions and the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

Euro-Med Monitor stressed that Israel—like any other country—must abide by the principles of international law, which stipulate that the dead must be respected and protected during armed conflicts, and that the parties involved must take all reasonable steps to prevent the confiscation and dismemberment of dead bodies.

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