

Gaza braces for anniversary of demonstrations at frontier with Israel

Monday 1 April 2019, by [HOLMES Oliver](#) (Date first published: 29 March 2019).

UN says 194 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire and close to 29,000 wounded in past 12 months

[Gaza](#) is on edge before a planned Saturday protest to mark the anniversary of mass rallies along its frontier, after a year in which Israeli soldiers have shot thousands of people.

The United Nations, which has [accused](#) Israeli sharpshooters of intentionally firing on civilians, [released new casualty figures](#) showing the devastating impact so far: 194 Palestinians, including 41 children, have been killed at the weekly demonstrations. Close to 29,000 have been wounded, a quarter of them shot. In the same period, one Israeli soldier has been killed.

The anniversary comes at a time of heightened tensions. Hamas, which rules Gaza and supports the movement, recently [fired rockets](#) deep into its neighbour's territory. Israel and the militant group have [fought multiple battles](#) in the past year, often following particularly deadly protest days at the fence.

Meanwhile, [Israel is due to hold elections](#) on 9 April and there are growing domestic calls for a decisive blow against Hamas. There are also demands to further crack down on the protests, which Israel refers to as "violent riots". As well as burning tyres, Palestinians have torched Israeli fields by launching kites and balloons attached to cans of petrol and incendiary devices.

[Protest](#) leaders, including Hamas, are calling for all of Gaza to shut down on Saturday for the afternoon demonstration. In a statement, they warned participants to keep the event "peaceful and popular".

"We call upon our people, especially young people, to take the utmost care and caution from the criminal enemy snipers," it added.

The Great March of Return demonstration [was launched](#) with aims to lift a blockade that has trapped the enclave's 2 million residents and to push for recognition of the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

Most of Gaza's residents are refugees and their descendants who were expelled or fled from their homes and villages in the wars surrounding Israel's creation in 1948.

The rallies began with festival-like events, including traditional *dabke* dancing, and family meals. Rocks and petrol-bombs were thrown and there were attempts to breach the fence using wire-cutters. As the death toll climbed, there were incidents reported of people lobbing explosive devices at the barrier.

Since day one, Israel has referred to the protest movement as a "well-organised and violent terror

gathering” - a [claim UN investigators dispute](#) - and has not changed its live fire policy, despite [international outrage](#).

Saturday is also Land Day, a commemoration of the Israeli killing of six unarmed Arab protesters in 1976, who were demonstrating land confiscations in northern [Israel](#).

The aid group, MSF, also known as Doctors Without Borders, said thousands shot by Israeli forces had now been abandoned.

“With a health system ruined by more than a decade of Israeli blockades, they receive little help from the Palestinian authorities who are stuck in a political stalemate where the medical needs of the population are not their top priority,” it said, adding it had been “overwhelmed” by the crisis.

“These are not simple wounds that can be easily stitched up. Huge chunks of people’s legs have been blown out and their bones shattered.”

Oliver Holmes

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P.S.

The Guardian, March 29, 2019

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/29/gaza-braces-for-anniversary-of-demonstrations-at-frontier-wth-israel>