

update Israel and Hamas agree ceasefire – 19 June

Key points:

- **Israel and Hamas agree to Egyptian mediated ceasefire**
 - **Initial 72 hour cessation of hostilities began today at 6am**
 - **Negotiations continue on opening of Rafah crossing and release of captured Israeli soldier**
 - **Ceasefire goes into effect following a barrage of 30 Qassam rockets**
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Latest developments

- The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip went into effect this morning at 6am. The ceasefire started with a 72-hour cessation of hostilities on both sides.
- Hamas has agreed to halt all attacks from Gaza, by its own militant wing as well as other armed groups, in return for Israel not carrying out any military strikes in Gaza and moving towards easing the economic blockade in the coming days.
- The issue of kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was not included in this stage of the ceasefire conditions.
- Prime Minister Gordon Brown, speaking at Prime Ministers Questions on Wednesday (18 June), said he welcomed the ceasefire announcement and praised the Egyptians for brokering the agreement. He said:

“I think the whole House will be pleased to have heard of the ceasefire that has been announced, thanks to the work of the Egyptians whom I praise, between Hamas and Israel, and that – hopefully – will bring greater peace to Gaza... (a) peace settlement must be based on a security agreement which only the Palestinians and the Israelis should sign and I hope it moves forward quickly.” (18/06/08)

- Foreign Secretary David Miliband released a statement also welcoming the agreement and calling for further steps to improve the situation on the ground.

“The ceasefire comes after a period in which the humanitarian situation in Gaza has significantly deteriorated and Israelis in southern Israel have faced an almost daily barrage of rockets. A ceasefire would be an important first step to improve the daily lives of ordinary people on both sides.” (18/06/08)

- Prior to the ceasefire coming into effect, over 30 Qassam rockets were fired from Gaza yesterday, lightly wounding one woman. Spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, Mark Regev, said the ceasefire offered a new reality for Israelis in the south that have been living with daily rocket attacks since Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007.
- Moments before the truce began the Israel Air Force killed a member of an armed gang preparing to launch a rocket attack from central Gaza. Olmert announced on Wednesday that the security cabinet had instructed Defence

Minister, Ehud Barak to prepare for a military operation in Gaza should the truce fail.

- Hundreds of residents from Israeli communities suffering from Gaza rocket barrages launched a campaign to actively oppose the government's failure to protect the communities from attack. Their first proposed move was to stop paying taxes to the state. Last week (15 June) residents tried to prevent trucks entering Gaza in protest at the Israeli government's policy to continue providing basic humanitarian goods to Gaza while daily rocket barrages continue to be fired at Israel from the Strip, with over 1000 rockets being fired this year alone.

Terms of the Ceasefire

- The ceasefire deal is a staged agreement that aims to ease the humanitarian situation in Gaza while ensuring the security of Israeli communities in the Western Negev.
 - In the first stage of the deal, militants are to halt their attacks on Israel, and Israel is to cease its raids in Gaza.
 - If the cessation of violence is maintained, Israel is due to begin to ease its blockade of Gaza on Sunday (22 June) and allow the shipment of more humanitarian supplies into Gaza. A week later Israel is to further ease restrictions at cargo crossings, which in recent months have been closed to all but humanitarian aid and restricted fuel supplies.
 - Depending on the progress made at these various stages, the final stage of the ceasefire is set to focus on reopening the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt and Hamas' release of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit who has been held in Gaza since he was seized by Hamas militants in June 2006.

Background

- Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Since then over 1400 rockets and 1700 mortars have been fired from Gaza into southern Israel killing and wounding Israeli civilians. The IDF has responded to these attacks with air and ground incursions into Gaza and imposed restrictions on the supply of fuel into Gaza since October 2007.
- Egyptian President Mubarak led the recent efforts to broker the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas to try and ease the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza.
- Negotiations over a ceasefire initially stalled primarily because of Israeli fears that Hamas would use the lull in violence as an opportunity to rearm and regroup.