News



Palestinians take part in a protest in Nablus, West Bank, Oct. 18 in support of the people in Gaza, after hundreds of Palestinians were killed the previous day following an airstrike on the CNEWA-supported al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City. (OSV News/Reuters/Raneen Sawafta)



Judith Sudilovsky

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Jerusalem — October 18, 2023
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Just hours before a rocket exploded in the courtyard of the Anglican-run al-Ahli Arab Hospital compound in Gaza Oct. 17 people had gathered there to sing for peace and children were playing, said Jerusalem Anglican Archbishop Hosam Naoum in a press conference Oct. 18.

"We grieve and we mourn and ask that all our institutions in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East … and other churches witness a day of mourning for the loss of these innocent lives," he said in Jerusalem, flanked by representatives of other churches including the Latin patriarch, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa.

Naoum called the explosion a "crime against humanity" but did not direct blame on any one force.

Israel and Hamas have been exchanging blame for the rocket explosion that landed in the parking lot of the Anglican compound, which consists of seven big buildings around a central courtyard, a church and the parking lot. Despite being pressed by journalists to name a guilty party, Naoum said as churches they were not equipped to determine who was to blame.

"We are people of the cloth; we are people of the church. We are not military experts to come to conclusions," the Anglican archbishop said. "We know there are many houses and many places which have been bombed by Israel. But who did this is not for us to determine. What we see is what is happening on the ground and hope people will come to the conclusion that this is enough of war and enough with lives which have been lost on both sides."

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"We as heads of churches are against any violence against any innocent people. People will not put words in our mouths," he added strongly. "What we are saying is quite clear: We are against any violence against innocent people on any side of the divide."

While Palestinian officials said the hospital was hit in an Israeli strike and had killed some 500 people, the Israel Defense Forces said intelligence showed a Palestinian Islamic Jihad group was responsible for the "failed rocket launch" that struck the al-Ahli Arab Hospital, called Baptist Hospital by many media outlets as it was managed between 1954 and 1982 by the Medical Mission of the Southern Baptist Church. It was established in Gaza in 1882.

The administrative offices of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and all of the employees, schools and offices of the Custody of the Holy Land observed a day of mourning for the victims of "the senseless war."

In a press conference the following morning IDF spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said they had taken five hours to investigate the incident "in order to be accurate" with their information, and presented the recording of a conversation between Hamas operatives regarding the Islamic Jihad failed rocket launch on the hospital on Oct. 17, 2023; visual analysis following the Israeli Air Force's examination on the subject; and an infographic of all the failed rocket launches in the Gaza Strip since the beginning of the war.

He said the IDF had recorded 450 misfired rockets by Palestinian militants since Israel's airstrikes began following a Hamas massacre on civilian communities on the Israeli southern border which left 1,200 people dead.

Hagari said more in-depth intelligence analysis would be presented to the United States and other "friends."

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Israel has repeatedly accused Hamas and Islamic Jihad of using civilians and buildings such as hospitals and schools as human shields.

Naoum, who said he had not slept since the day before, said the hospital had been hit by two missiles a few days earlier, one which destroyed the fourth floor of a new

diagnostic center and the another which hit the ultrasound and mammography unit.

No deaths were reported in that incident.

He said that along with the other 15 hospitals in Gaza, al-Ahli Hospital had received evacuation warnings from Israel as Israel gave a warning to Gazans to move from northern Gaza to the south. He said the hospital had received warnings to evacuate on the three days prior to the explosion but there were none on the day of the explosion.

"The different hospitals took the stand to continue functioning. How can they leave the hospital (with) everything that is happening? We had the moral obligation to notify everyone in the hospital to evacuate the hospital," he said. "The hospital will continue to be open. We are determined not only as the Anglican church but all churches, to keep our institutions open and as places of sanctuary to those most vulnerable."

Most of the staff were inside the hospital and in the operating rooms at the time of the explosion, he said.

"We hope and pray this will end soon so all civilians on all sides can be safe in their own homes," said Naoum.

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>
> — Jerusalem Anglican Archbishop Hosam Naoum
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The explosion, which caused violent demonstrations in various Arab countries, took place the evening before U.S. President Biden arrived in Israel for a speedy consultation with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Jordanian Foreign Minister announced the cancellation of a summit it was to host in Amman between Biden and Egyptian and Palestinian leaders.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has announced increased security measures for Jewish institutions in Germany following an arson attack on a synagogue in Berlin in the early morning hours local time on Oct. 18, German Catholic news agency KNA

reported.

Assailants threw two Molotov cocktails at the synagogue in the center of the German capital, police said, as antisemitic incidents in the country have been rising following events in Israel and Gaza.