

A DAY IN THE LIVES OF GAZANS – IN THEIR OWN WORDS

(From the Thursday BBC News website: 'We're doing things a bit differently in this page. After nearly five months of fighting in Gaza, the lives of people there have changed dramatically. Today they are telling us how, in their own words. We're receiving text messages, voicenotes and pictures from people in Gaza, with help from journalists on the ground, Alice Cuddy in Jerusalem and BBC Arabic's team in London.')

'I heard a bomb last night. I felt terrified'

Malak Al Deirbi is 12-years-old and sells crisps to help feed her family. She tells us what last night was like in Rafah:

"I am now out sitting at my booth and selling. I heard the bomb last night. It was very close and the sound was very loud. I am scared. I felt terrified. We thought they would bomb more.'

'I try to distract myself from the pain of losing my husband'

Samira Noorallah, 65, is in Deir al-Balah refugee camp, central Gaza. Following the death of her husband, she tells us how she's navigating challenges:

'My husband died in the camp while he was suffering from the effects of a stroke. I have been awake since early. I first cleaned the laundry, but then I find it's still dirty, so I have to redo it. I try to put my energy into keeping myself busy after witnessing the pain of losing my husband.

I try to distract myself with household chores, such as doing the laundry. My husband left me with a feeling of emptiness. I used to spend my days with him, helping him, feeding him... Today, I have no energy for anything.

Later I will try to have some fun with my grandchildren. They make me forget my pain. After having a house of 300 square meters, now we live in a tent.'

'Food prices are astronomical'

We're now hearing from Yahya Hussen, a 30-year-old fashion designer who fled Al-Zahra, a neighbourhood just south of Gaza City, to Deir Al-Balah in October. He tells us:

'The network is so bad. Unfortunately it wasn't a good night. There was bombing close to us. I was just saying to my family that I didn't sleep well last night - I jumped from my bed seven times at least.

I woke up properly at 9ish and had breakfast with my family. We had za'atar and olive oil, hummus and shakshuka. Sometimes you find stuff like this, but if you do it's double the price.

The prices are astronomical. Not everyone can buy stuff like this - eggs or coffee or za'atar. When people get aid they might keep half of it and sell the other half. So if they had 10 pieces of cheese, they might keep five, sell five, and then use that money to try to buy eggs. Now I'm sitting, not doing anything. In the past I used to wake up - choose my clothes, take a bath. That process that used to take a few minutes now it takes all day.

If I want to take wash now I wake up early in the morning and have to light a fire to heat the water, and wait for it, getting smoke in your eyes and your lungs. And after the water is heated you go to wash. And after you finish you go back to the barrel you got the water from and try to refill it because many families are using the same barrel. This is the best morning I can hope for now. Other people can't find food, water, nothing.'

And what of the Israeli hostages still being held in Gaza

Yocheved Lifschitz, 85, said she "went through hell" in captivity. More than 250 Israelis and foreigners were kidnapped by Hamas on 7 October, according to Israel. Of those taken, 130 remain unaccounted for. On 12 February, Israel said at least 29 of them are dead. Since then another hostage, Yair Yaakov, has been confirmed to have died. Israel gives an official figure of 134 hostages because it includes four people taken hostage in 2014 and 2015. Two of these are believed to have died. We don't know a lot about the condition of the hostages still being held by Hamas, but we have heard accounts from those who have been released so far. Yocheved Lifschitz, the 85-year-old grandmother who was released in late October said she "went through hell" in captivity. Wichian Temthong, a Thai farm worker held with the three men mistakenly killed by the IDF, said they were only fed once a day and he saw Israeli hostages being beaten with electric cables.

'We woke to a new day, hoping it would be better than yesterday'

We've just received a voicenote from Sami Abu Omar, 59, who is currently sheltering in Rafah having fled from Khan Younis. He tells us:

'It was a hard night. There was intense bombing. Any person in this situation has to get used to sleeping for an hour to an hour and a half only. I woke at 5am and prayed at dawn and then got ready for my volunteer work. We woke up to a new day, hoping it would be a better day than yesterday.

I work in humanitarian aid. We started our day by cooking to help the displaced families in Rafah. We are hoping to do 2,200 meals for these families today. The weather today is slightly cold. There is a possibility of rain falling. We are preparing lentil soup that will be distributed to the displaced families because they are in need. I am one of these families. I have been displaced from more than one place. I dream of going back to my home, safe and sound. The situation is becoming so hard, especially in Rafah.'

'I woke during the night because the tent was so cold'

We've just had a message from Mosa Al-Dos, a 26-year-old lawyer in Rafah:

"I woke up more than one time in the night because it was so cold in the tent," he says.

"I struggle to sleep because of the lack of mattresses and blankets. There are a lot of queues today - they are reaching at least three hours.

"Now I am two kilometres away from my tent, trying to find internet connection but it is still very weak. I am slowly, slowly walking further from the tent," he adds.

'A typical day for me starts with the search for clean water'

Dr Haya Hijazi was a gynaecologist in Tal al-Hawa, now living in a tent on the Egypt-Rafah border. The 28-year-old gynaecologist used to work at Al-Shifa hospital until early October. When her neighbourhood was targeted by Israeli forces, she fled the North to her sister's home in the centre of Gaza, then had to flee again to the south. Dr Haya has tried to provide

free consultations to women since the beginning of the war. She has been active in gathering donations through her social media and has used them to purchase medicines and sanitary products for women in Gaza. "A typical day for me starts with the search for clean water. Then I look for flour so we can bake, and wood to light a fire so we can eat. I try to come up with new initiatives through which I can help people, and every day I volunteer at a nearby medical station to help patients," she told us.

'Food is becoming a luxury for us in Gaza'

Naghham Atef Mezied, 22, is in Deir el-Balah. She is a medical student and volunteer doctor. She shares what her morning has been like with us:

'Time is now 9am. This is my breakfast. I usually have breakfast at 6am but now we are trying to delay having breakfast, so we don't need to eat more than one meal per day. This breakfast is cheese, herbs, pepper and olive oil on bread, which is known as *mankouche*. This is all I eat until the evening, if we are lucky to have another meal then, otherwise this is all until tomorrow. And we consider ourselves luckier than our brothers and sisters in the north who have no food whatsoever. On the breakfast table before, we used to have this bread, "*Mankoushe*" with potatoes, salad, eggs, falafel, beans...but now so many families rely on this bread only to survive. Prices are so high, even for the basics, and affording a decent meal of meat or chicken became a luxury.

'Before the war we used to buy bread, now we make it'

Aseel Mousa, 26, in Rafah, has sent us pictures from her morning spent baking bread over fire. She tells us: 'I woke up at 06:30 in Rafah, prayed and because I had electricity and internet connection I seized the chance and did some work. After that, I started helping my mum to make bread. Before the war we used to buy bread, now we make it in our homes. We get wood, start a fire, make dough, put it into portions, let it rise. This is what we're doing now. This process takes at least three hours.

'I eat and sleep in Al-Shifa hospital'

Dr Mohamed Al Sheikh sent us this message just over an hour ago from Al-Shifa, the main hospital in northern Gaza, which has been the focus of Israel's ground offensive:

'I sleep here at the hospital. We work on a 24/7 basis. We can only take three to four hours rest. For the rest of the time we work. We don't go to our homes. Our families are here in northern Gaza, staying in shelters in schools. We have no communications with them.

Regarding food, only a few items are available, especially with a lack of flour and rice, and there is a shortage of basic food necessities. We provide whatever we can. We have been receiving casualties who are mainly women, children and the elderly.

The casualties were sleeping when [the attacks happened] and came here after they were injured. Since the beginning of the war in October I have only left the hospital twice.'

A family's search for food in a crowded Rafah market

Abedalqader Hammad, a 59-year-old university lecturer, has just spoken to us on the phone from a market in Rafah. He told us: 'I'm in the market walking now with one of my sons, trying to find food for the family. The market is so crowded. You can hardly move in between all the people. When searching for food, usually we find tins of chickpeas and beans. Today I'm trying to find something different - a new kind of food, so we can have a change from the

food we've been eating for the past five months. I tried to buy chicken. Usually I wouldn't eat frozen chicken. One kilogram of frozen chicken can cost me the equivalent of £16.00). And I need at least two chickens to feed my family.

One kilogram of onions can cost \$15. I need to buy Mulukhiyah [a type of vegetable], but each kilo is 20 shekels so two kilos will be 40 shekels or more than £8.

So if I calculate what I need today for my family, I think it could cost me almost £60. The things I need are available but in very small amounts. Some things go to the black market.'

We keep our bags packed in case we need to flee'

Rewaa Mohsen, a nurse, has just made contact from Deir al Balah through WhatsApp. The mother-of-two gave birth to her youngest daughter just two days before the war began. She says it's been "very hard" to keep her daughters calm and entertained. "She has her cousins to play with. Also have toys," she says over WhatsApp, referring to her two-year-old. "We try to keep her busy so she don't hear bombs."

Rewaa says her day so far has consisted of doing house work - cleaning and washing the dishes - while feeding her youngest daughter. She sends a picture of bags piled at the side of her home, intended to be grabbed at a moment's notice in case the family needs to flee.

'A night I wouldn't wish on anyone'

We've just made contact with 40-year-old Nashwa Rezeq in Rafah. We spoke to her last year after she fled from her home in the neighbourhood of al-Zahra, which was later bombed. In a short voice note, Nashwa says she received more bad news overnight:

It's been a very, very dreadful night because we just received the news that my father-in-law's house that we thought we'd go to after the war has been bombed. It was a night that I wouldn't wish on anyone. We are 28 people living in two rooms. I don't know what my fate will be, where we will go with the children, especially as Ramadan is coming.

'We yearn for an urgent ceasefire'

We're hearing again from Nagham Atef Mezied, the 22-year-old medical student residing in Deir al Balah. She's telling us more about scenes from Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital and her hopes for a ceasefire:

The relentless barrage of rockets and explosions orchestrated by the Israeli occupation within Gaza's borders exacts a toll that transcends mere mortality; it robs survivors of limbs, sight, and hearing, plunging them into a perpetual nightmare. In Gaza, we do not merely fear death, we dread the prospect of disability, the erosion of dreams, and the dwindling of hope. The lack of medical supplies, due to the closure of the Rafah crossing and ongoing Israeli restrictions, renders even minor medical interventions a Herculean task.

Travel constraints imposed on the wounded and patients seeking treatment abroad compound the peril and exacerbate the decline in health standards.

While death may represent a swift end, it is not our sole apprehension. We yearn for cessation, for an urgent ceasefire, and for unimpeded access to vital humanitarian aid, spanning every corner of Gaza, from north to south.