

## Israeli house strikes killed mostly civilians

Children made up one-third of total

Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The youngest to die was a 4-day-old girl, the oldest a 92-year-old man.

They were among at least 844 Palestinians killed as a result of airstrikes on Gaza homes during Israel's summer war with the Islamic militant group, Hamas.

Under the rules of war, homes are protected civilian sites unless used for military purposes. Israel says it attacked only legitimate targets, alleging militants used the houses to hide weapons, fighters and command centers. Palestinians say Israel's warplanes often struck without regard for civilians.

The Associated Press examined 247 airstrikes, interviewing witnesses, visiting attack sites and compiling a detailed casualty count.

The review found that 508 of the dead — just over 60 percent — were children, women and older men, all presumed to be civilians. Hamas says it did not use women as fighters in the war, and an Israel-based research group, the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, which tracks militants among the war dead, said it has no evidence women participated in combat.

In addition: — Children younger than 16 made up one-third of the total: 280 killed, including 19 babies and 108 preschoolers between the ages of 1 and 5.

— In 83 strikes, three or more members of one family died.

— Among those killed were 96 confirmed or suspected militants — just over 11 percent of the total — though the actual number could be higher since armed groups have not released detailed casualty lists.

— The remaining 240 dead were males between the ages of 16 and 59 whose names did not appear in AP searches of militant websites or on street posters honoring



In this Nov. 17 photo, Mahmoud Abu Amer, 37, walks amid the ruins of an apartment building where 16 relatives were killed by an Israeli airstrike on July 29, in Khan Younis, Gaza. The building was one of scores targeted by Israel in its war last summer with the Islamic militant Hamas. Israel says it only attacked homes used by militants for military purposes, while Palestinians say warplanes often struck without regard for civilians.

fighters.

The review was the most painstaking attempt to date to try to determine who was killed in strikes on homes; Israel's army and Gaza militants have refused to release information about targets and casualties. The count tracked all known airstrikes on homes, though not all strikes had witnesses and damage inspected by the AP wasn't always conclusive.

The number of civilian deaths has been a key issue in the highly charged battle over the dominant narrative of the 50-day war.

Fighting erupted in July, after a month of escalating tensions triggered by Hamas' abduction and killing of three Israeli teens in the West Bank, and an Israeli arrest sweep of Hamas supporters that led to renewed Gaza rocket fire on Israel.

Israel says it tried to avoid harming civilians, even as Hamas embedded weapons and fighters in residential areas.

Palestinians say Israel attacked with disproportionate force and callous disregard for civilians.

If most of those killed are civilians, "you cannot call

them collateral damage," said Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian spokeswoman.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has asked the International Criminal Court to investigate the war, a move that could pave the way for possible prosecution of both Israel and Hamas.

International law experts note that a high civilian death toll alone does not constitute conclusive evidence of war crimes. But it "raises a red flag and suggests that further investigation is warranted," said Alex Whiting, a former top official at the ICC in The Hague, Netherlands.

Israel would not say how many of its 5,000 air attacks were directed at homes. However, it insists it only aimed at legitimate military targets.

Asked for comment on the AP's findings, an Israeli army spokesman, Lt. Peter Lerner, said that "one cannot draw broad conclusions" by examining only a small percentage of Israel's airstrikes.

Reuven Erlich, a former senior Israeli intelligence officer, questioned the reliability of Gaza witnesses and said only military experts could determine what

happened in each strike.

According to preliminary U.N. figures, at least 1,483 Palestinian civilians were killed in the war — 66 percent of the overall death toll of 2,205.

Gaza militants fired about 4,300 rockets and mortar rounds at Israel, according to the Israeli military. The barrages drove tens of thousands of Israelis from their homes to seek cover. Five civilians were killed, among them a 4-year-old boy, along with 67 soldiers.

Advocacy groups and U.N. investigators have said that Hamas' battle tactics over the years, including indiscriminate rocket fire at Israel, amount to war crimes.

The AP examined cases in which people were killed in homes or adjacent yards, including those hit by shrapnel or debris from attacks on neighboring buildings. The count excluded artillery strikes which are inherently inaccurate.

Starting in November, three reporters visited the vast majority of attack sites, interviewed survivors and collected hundreds of death certificates — documents recognized by Israel as proof of mortality.

## Obama calls on Silicon Valley to help thwart cyber attacks

PALO ALTO, Calif. (AP) — Cyberspace is the new "Wild West," President Barack Obama said Friday, with everyone looking to the government to be the sheriff. But he told the private sector it must do more to stop cyber attacks aimed at the U.S. every day.

"Everybody is online, and everybody is vulnerable," Obama said during a White House cybersecurity summit at Stanford University, just miles from Google, Facebook, Intel and other internet giants.

**"Everybody is online, and everybody is vulnerable."**

— President Obama

"The business leaders here want their privacy and their children protected, just like the consumer and privacy advocates here want America to keep leading the world in technology and be safe from attacks," he said.

Partnering with the federal government is a hard sell in the Silicon Valley. The pace of innovation in California's tech hub outstrips Beltway bureaucracy, and tech firms chafe at regulations that could limit their reach.

Further disclosures from former intelligence contractor Edward Snowden exposing sweeping U.S. government surveillance programs have angered many. The programs tapped into data from firms including Google and Yahoo.

"There's a drastic collective disconnect that I think the administration is working hard to bridge," said Amy Zegart, co-director of Stanford's Center for International Security and Cooperation, who met with Obama before his speech.

Obama told more than 1,500 business leaders, students, professors and reporters that information about threats must be

shared and responded to quickly. And he signed an executive order aimed at making it easier for private firms to have access to classified information about cyber attacks.

The administration wants Congress to replace the existing patchwork of state laws with a national standard giving companies 30 days to notify consumers if their personal information has been compromised.

"The new proposals face significant headwinds, both legislatively

from Congress and cooperatively from heavyweights in the tech sector," said Ben Desjardins, director of security solutions at cybersecurity firm Radware. "Based on the Snowden leaks, these companies believe they've already been badly burned by the government, and have very little to gain by publicly backing the president's proposals."

Scott Algeier, executive director of the non-profit Information Sharing and Analysis Center, has been working from the private-sector side to get the government to share information. He said the new executive order seems more like a federal takeover of private-sector information sharing.

"There's a lot of talk today about 'public-private partnerships.' But there isn't a partnership here," he said.

Nonetheless, there was agreement at the daylong summit among White House officials and leaders from a broad business sector — including utilities, health care, insurance and finance — that the threat is getting worse, and no single institution can take it on.

### BRIEFLY

#### Ukraine cease-fire deadline provokes last-gasp battle

ARTEMIVSK, Ukraine (AP) — Russian-backed separatists mounted a vicious assault Friday in eastern Ukraine ahead of a weekend cease-fire deadline, pummeling a strategic railway hub with wave upon wave of shelling in a last-minute grab for territory. At least 26 people were killed across the region.

The fiercest confrontations focused on the government-held town of Debaltseve, a key transport center that has been on the receiving end of dozens of artillery and rocket salvos in the 24-hour period after the peace deal was sealed Thursday by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France.

Associated Press reporters observed intense shelling Friday along the highway north of Debaltseve, which remains the town's only land link with the rest of government-controlled territory.

The deadline for the warring sides to halt hostilities is Sunday at one minute after midnight. Interfax-Ukraine news agency quoted Petro Mekhed, Ukraine's deputy defense minister, as saying that separatist forces had been tasked with hoisting their flags over Debaltseve, as well as the key port city of Mariupol, before the cease-fire takes hold.

Military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said 11 soldiers have been killed and 40 wounded across eastern Ukraine since the agreement was reached in the Belarusian capital, Minsk. At least eight civilians also have died in government-controlled territory, regional authorities loyal to Kiev said, while the rebels said seven civilians were killed in artillery attacks on the separatist-held cities of Luhansk and Horlivka.



#### Alabama's stand against gay marriage crumbles

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Gays and lesbians could get licenses to marry in more than half of Alabama's counties Friday after a federal judge affirmed her ruling striking down the state's same-sex marriage ban.

More than a dozen counties reversed course Friday and began issuing the licenses to same-sex couples in the wake Thursday's strongly worded order from U.S. District Judge Callie Granade. By mid-day Friday, at least 35 of the state's 67 counties were complying.

"These numbers represent a seismic shift in favor of equality and justice. Resistance to happy, loving and committed same-sex couples getting married is quickly crumbling throughout the state," said Fred Sainz, a top spokesman for the Human Rights Campaign, which has been lobbying to expand gay rights nationwide.

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday rejected Alabama's request to keep Granade's decision on hold until it decides later this year whether gays and lesbians have a fundamental right to marry and whether states can ban the unions.

But Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore has remained defiant, demanding that the state's probate judges keep refusing to issue licenses to same-sex couples until the final word from the nation's highest court.

## NINETY PERCENT OF SMOKERS START BEFORE THEY ARE EIGHTEEN



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