Bodies Without Names | Gaza's Martyrs Returned from Israeli Freezers to the Cemetery of Numbers

After the Gaza ceasefire of 10 October 2025, the Zionist occupation began handing over, through the International Committee of the Red Cross, batches of the bodies of Palestinian martyrs it had held throughout the genocidal war. The bodies did not return to their families as the dead should: they arrived in white bags, many decomposed or charred, some with hands bound and eyes blindfolded, some bearing the marks of tank tracks, and most without a name. [1][2]

By mid-February 2026 Gaza’s Health Ministry had received the remains of 414 Palestinians, while by early December 2025 only 99 of 345 bodies had been identified. Hundreds were buried in the “cemetery of numbers” for the unidentified south of Deir al-Balah, and some 9,500 families are still waiting to learn the fate of their sons. [3][4]

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In numbers

Item	Details
Start of handovers	After the ceasefire of 10 October 2025
Mechanism	Through the Red Cross: 15 Palestinian bodies for each body of an Israeli captive
Received by Gaza by February 2026	The remains of 414 Palestinians
Identified	99 of 345 by early December 2025
Buried in Deir al-Balah cemetery for the unidentified	More than 450 since the truce
Held by the occupation before the agreement	735 bodies, according to the national campaign to retrieve bodies
At the Sde Teiman camp	About 1,500 bodies of Gazans, according to a Haaretz report
Families waiting	About 9,500

[5][3][4][2]

What the bodies revealed

From the first batches, medical teams at Nasser Medical Complex documented clear traces of crimes. Sameh Hamad, a member of the committee receiving the bodies, said: “There are signs of torture and executions.” Bodies arrived blindfolded and handcuffed, which medical sources saw as an indication of field executions; most had bands around their necks, and one had a rope around his neck. [1]

Gaza’s Health Ministry confirmed the bodies had been subjected to “crushing, mutilation and torture,” describing open wounds, gouged-out eyes, mouths without teeth, tank-track marks, close-range gunshots, dismembered bodies, and others **completely charred**. Other bodies bore gunshot wounds to the chest and head and fractures of the skull and limbs. [2][4]

Some arrived decomposed, some frozen, some covered in sand and dust. It remains unclear whether the occupation army exhumed some of them from cemeteries during its ground offensive, or whether they were detainees killed in captivity. [1][4]

Bodies without names

Almost none of the bodies came with a name. In one batch of 45, the occupation provided names for only three. Ahmed Dhaher, head of forensic medicine at Nasser Medical Complex, said the remaining bodies had “no data, marks or information,” and that his department was using “primitive means” to identify them, because it has no DNA-testing equipment. [6][1]

The occupation has destroyed or damaged 94% of the Strip’s health facilities and most of its laboratories, and has blocked the entry of genetic-testing equipment. Identification thus depends on clothing and personal belongings – rings, watches, keys – and on height, build and injuries. Photographs of the bodies were shown to families at Nasser Hospital and on screens at al-Shifa, and the Health Ministry published a link to selected images “that respect the dignity of the deceased,” but the success rate remained limited. [2][3][1][4]

In February 2026 the Red Cross handed over 120 bags containing 54 bodies and skull samples in 66 separate bags. Families came to al-Shifa for a week without identifying any of the remains in that batch, so severe was the mutilation and so many parts were missing. Shadi al-Fayoumi, whose brothers disappeared in the al-Tuffah neighbourhood while searching for food and water during the famine, said the images he saw were unclear and that no institution had given him reliable information. [7][3]

The cemetery of numbers in Deir al-Balah

Faced with too few refrigeration units and no genetic testing, the Health Ministry decided to bury the bodies that could not be identified. Fifteen unidentified martyrs were buried on 1 December 2025, and 53 more in February 2026, in the “cemetery

of numbers” for the unidentified south of Deir al-Balah, where more than 450 martyrs have been laid to rest since the truce. [4][3]

The graves are built with primitive means from stones and the rubble of destroyed homes, and are numbered; photographs of the bodies and samples kept in numbered tubes are preserved in the hope of testing them one day. As the Civil Defence put it: “They were buried with numbers after samples were taken, and they will remain unidentified until genetic-testing equipment is available.” [3][2][8]

An old policy with a new face

This is not the first time the occupation has handed over unidentified bodies: in August 2024, during the war, it handed over dozens of fully decomposed bodies. It is an extension of the policy of holding martyrs’ bodies in freezers and in the “cemeteries of numbers”: in August 2026 the occupation was holding at least 799 identified Palestinian bodies. [9][10]

The difference is that this time the “cemetery of numbers” is in Gaza itself, dug by Palestinians with their own hands for their own sons, because the occupation returned the bodies without names and destroyed the laboratories that could have given those names back.

Between the accounts

Whose bodies are they? Annahar describes the batch of 3 November 2025 as “the bodies of 45 prisoners,” while Al Jazeera English says it is unclear whether they were detainees killed in captivity or martyrs whose graves were dug up during the invasion; most wore civilian clothes and some wore uniforms. [5][1]

How many bodies are held: the national campaign to retrieve bodies says the occupation held 735 bodies before the agreement, while citing Haaretz that the occupation army holds about 1,500 bodies of Gazans at Sde Teiman. The occupation has not said how many it holds or how many it will return. [3][1]

Numbers identified: 97 of 330 in mid-November 2025 and 99 of 345 in early December; no cumulative figures were available after that. [11][4]

Place of burial: Al Jazeera Net's text places the burial of 15 unidentified bodies in the Deir al-Balah cemeteries, while a photo with the report shows a mass burial of 15 bodies in Khan Younis on 26 November 2025. [8]

Timeline

Date	Event
August 2024	During the war the occupation hands over dozens of decomposed, unidentified bodies [9]
10 October 2025	The ceasefire and the exchange of bodies begin [5]
15 October 2025	45 bodies bring the total to 90, with signs of torture and executions [1]
18 October 2025	The total reaches 135, with bodies bound and blindfolded [12]
3 November 2025	The seventh batch: 45 bodies [5]
15 November 2025	97 of 330 bodies identified [11]
1 December 2025	15 unidentified bodies buried; 99 of 345 identified [4]
February 2026	120 bags containing 54 bodies and skull samples, none identified [7]
13 February 2026	53 bodies buried in the cemetery for the unidentified; Gaza has received 414 remains [3]

Frequently asked questions about the bodies returned to Gaza

How many bodies has the occupation returned to Gaza?

The remains of 414 Palestinians by mid-February 2026, under the first phase of the exchange agreement. [3]

Why couldn’t families identify their sons?

Because the bodies arrived decomposed, charred or mutilated and without names, and because the occupation destroyed the laboratories and blocked DNA-testing equipment. [2][6]

What marks were found on the bodies?

Bound hands and blindfolds, ropes and bands around necks, close-range gunshots, tank-track marks, gouged-out eyes, and charred bodies. [1][2]

Where were the unidentified buried?

In the “cemetery of numbers” for the unidentified south of Deir al-Balah, in numbered graves, with samples kept for future testing. [3]

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