# The Great Return March Massacre

**On 14 May 2018, the day the US embassy moved to Jerusalem and on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Nakba, Israeli army snipers opened live fire on protesters at the "Million-Man March of Return" near the perimeter fence east of the Gaza Strip. Sixty Palestinians were killed and 2,771 wounded, over 1,100 of them by live fire.** [1] [2]

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs described it as the deadliest day in the occupied Palestinian territory since the 2014 war. [3] It is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

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## The 14 May massacre at a glance

| Item | Details |
|---|---|
| Date | Monday, 14 May 2018 [1] [3] |
| Place | Great March of Return camps near the perimeter fence east of the Gaza Strip [3] [4] |

| Item | Details |
|---|---|
| Occasion | The US embassy move to Jerusalem, on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Nakba [3] [2] |
| Perpetrator | Israeli occupation army snipers [1] |
| Killed | 60 per the UN Commission of Inquiry, including 7 children per OCHA [1] [3] |
| Wounded | 2,771 per the Ministry of Health, over 1,100 of them by live fire [2] [1] |
| UN position | Reasonable grounds to believe war crimes or crimes against humanity were committed [1] |

## The Great March of Return

The “Great March of Return and Breaking the Siege” began on 30 March 2018, Land Day, with weekly protests near the perimeter fence east of the Gaza Strip demanding the right of return and an end to the blockade. [3] [5] The organizers called a “million-man march” on 14 May, to coincide with the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem and the 70th anniversary of the Nakba. [3] [2]

## The massacre: embassy day

That day crowds converged on the return camps along the fence. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights affirmed that the protests were peaceful and that its field researchers observed no armed activity. [4]

Yet the occupation forces met the protesters with live fire, tear gas and shells. They targeted ambulances and medical crews and prevented them from reaching the wounded; 12 paramedics and 8 journalists had been injured by that afternoon. Many of the wounds were to the head and chest. [4]

On the other side, protesters injured one Israeli soldier. [3]

## The toll: what do the sources say?

| Source | Killed | Wounded |
|---|---|---|
| UN Commission of Inquiry | 60 | Over 1,100 shot with live fire [1] |
| OCHA (citing the Ministry of Health) | 59, including 7 children | About 2,900, 1,322 by live fire [3] |
| Gaza Ministry of Health (15 May toll) | 58 | More than 2,771 [2] |

## Reactions

Turkey recalled its ambassadors in Washington and Tel Aviv for consultations and declared three days of mourning. Many Arab states condemned the massacre, the UN Secretary-General expressed concern, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said the killing “must stop now.” Kuwait called an emergency session of the Security Council. [2]

On 18 May 2018 the Human Rights Council condemned “the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force” by the occupation forces, [3] and at a special session decided to establish an independent international commission of inquiry. [5]

## The UN Commission of Inquiry

On 28 February 2019 the UN Commission of Inquiry announced its findings. It described 14 May as a large-scale event that “must not be repeated,” in which 60 people were killed and over 1,100 shot. [1]

The Commission found reasonable grounds to believe that Israeli snipers shot at journalists, health workers, children and persons with disabilities, though they were clearly recognizable as such, and that these violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity. [1] It also found that the use of live ammunition against the demonstrators was unlawful in virtually all cases. [5]

Between 30 March and 31 December 2018, 189 Palestinians were killed in the Great March of Return protests, including 35 children, three paramedics and two journalists; 6,106 were shot with live ammunition, and 122 suffered amputations, 20 of them children. [1]

## Conclusion

While American and Israeli officials celebrated the opening of the embassy in Jerusalem, occupation snipers were shooting at protesters demanding the right of return east of Gaza, killing sixty and wounding thousands in a single day. A UN inquiry found grounds to believe war crimes were committed, yet no one has been held to account.

## Frequently asked questions about the Great March of Return massacre

### When did the Great March of Return massacre take place?

On Monday, 14 May 2018, the day of the US embassy move to Jerusalem and the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Nakba.

### How many people were killed on 14 May 2018?

60 according to the UN Commission of Inquiry, including 7 children according to OCHA, with 2,771 wounded according to the Ministry of Health.

### Were the protesters armed?

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights affirmed the protests were peaceful and observed no armed activity.

### What did the UN Commission of Inquiry find?

Reasonable grounds to believe snipers targeted journalists, paramedics and children, which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity.

### What was the Great March of Return?

Weekly protests that began on 30 March 2018 near the fence east of Gaza, demanding the right of return and an end to the blockade.

## Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.


1. “The UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 Gaza Protests,” OHCHR, 28 February 2019.
2. “The World Condemns the Israeli Massacre of Civilians in Gaza,” Arabi21 via Anadolu, 15 May 2018.
3. Protection of Civilians Report, 8–21 May 2018, UN OCHA.
4. Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, press release 52/2018, 14 May 2018.
5. Al-Haq, statement on the Great March of Return and the UN Commission of Inquiry report.