

# Trudeau calls for ceasefire and pledges to work with international community to de-escalate Israel-Hamas conflict

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A Palestinian youth looks for salvageable items amid the rubble of the Kuhail building which was destroyed in an early morning Israeli airstrike on Gaza City on May 18. MAHMUD HAMS/AFP/Getty Images

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau joined a chorus of international leaders calling for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas to end the bloodshed that has claimed the lives of innocent civilians in the escalating violence of the past two weeks.

“First of all, our hearts go out to Israelis and Palestinians for the violence that is surrounding them right now,” Mr. Trudeau said, adding that “we’ve all seen” the tragic images of families and children who have been affected.

Mr. Trudeau said the Canadian government will work with the international community to de-escalate the situation.

European Union foreign ministers also called for a ceasefire Tuesday. EU foreign-policy chief Josep Borrell said there was widespread agreement among ministers that “the priority is the immediate cessation of all violence and the implementation of a ceasefire.”

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the conflict could spread through the region without a ceasefire and that he hoped Israel would not launch a ground operation in Gaza. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said “the weapons must finally fall silent.”

U.S. President Joe Biden expressed support for a ceasefire during a call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday. However, Mr. Biden stopped short of demanding an immediate stop to the conflict.

The United Nations said more than 52,000 Palestinians have been displaced by Israeli air strikes. Jens Laerke, a spokesperson for the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said about 47,000 of the displaced people have sought refuge in UN-run schools in Gaza.

Israel bombed Gaza with air strikes and Hamas militants continued cross-border rocket fire on Tuesday after a brief pause overnight, during which time the United Nations said it sent a small fuel convoy.

Gaza medical officials said at least 213 Palestinians have been killed in air strikes, including 61 children, and more than 1,400 people have been wounded. Israeli authorities said 12 people have been killed in Israel, including two children.

Aid workers are also calling for an end to the violence. Helen Ottens-Patterson, head of mission for Gaza for Médecins sans frontières (Doctors Without Borders), said the bombardment needs to stop so aid can reach people in Gaza and work can be done to ensure “we don’t descend into absolute catastrophe where nothing will function.”

Ms. Ottens-Patterson said the distress on the population is “incalculable.”

“We hear children crying constantly around us, nobody can do anything to console them. It must be incredibly terrifying,” she said in an interview.

She said there are stories of families who huddle in one room, so that if they die, they are all together, while others separate into different rooms, so if a bomb hits, someone might survive.

NDP defence critic Jack Harris said the federal government should support diplomatic efforts to obtain a ceasefire and then start working on trying to find a lasting solution.

The NDP has also called on the Trudeau government to stop selling arms to Israel. That proposal was welcomed by Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, an advocacy group that urged the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party to follow suit. The Bloc and the Greens have called for a ceasefire but have not commented on the NDP proposal.

Conservative foreign-affairs critic Michael Chong said his party has been clear that Israel is one of Canada's closest allies and the Conservatives support "Israel's right to defend itself."

"Dialogue and peaceful negotiation are the only path forward towards a settlement between Israelis and Palestinians and an eventual two-state solution. We urge calm and sincerely hope that hostilities cease," he said in a statement.

Martin Sampson, a spokesperson for the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, an advocacy group, said the NDP's suggestion is concerning and that the party and its leader Jagmeet Singh are failing to differentiate between Hamas, a listed terrorist group in Canada, and Israel.

"Many Canadians, apparently Mr. Singh chief among them, do not appreciate the impossible situation Israel is placed in when Hamas fires missiles indiscriminately from civilian areas toward Israeli population centres," he said.

Mr. Sampson said he supports calls for a peaceful resolution for both Israelis and Palestinians. "Canada should continue its call for the international-consensus solution to this conflict," he said.

Mark Ayyash, a sociology professor at Mount Royal University, said the federal government should be putting pressure on Israel to comply with international law, rather than taking a "both sides" approach by condemning both Hamas and the eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah, a neighbourhood in East Jerusalem at the centre of a property dispute that inflamed tensions in the region.

"Unless there is a serious discussion on that root problem, and unless sanctions and pressure are brought on Israel to make it change its behaviour, then nothing will change for the Palestinians," Prof. Ayyash said.

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