

## Israel and Hamas agree ceasefire

**Israel and militant group Hamas have agreed on a truce starting on Thursday, Palestinian and Israeli officials have told the BBC.**

Israeli officials confirmed the start of the truce, but said Israel was "looking to see if this is serious".

A Hamas official said he was confident all militant groups in Gaza would abide by the agreement, brokered by Egypt.

Earlier at least six Palestinians were reportedly killed in Israeli air strikes in southern Gaza.

Israel said it had targeted "terror operatives".

Islamic Jihad said a missile struck a car carrying five of its members near Khan Younis. A sixth man died in a separate strike nearby.

### **Two-stage deal**

Hamas took over Gaza in June 2007, driving out forces loyal to Fatah, the political faction led by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Since then, Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the international community have sought to isolate Hamas.

Israel declared the territory a "hostile entity" and has blockaded it in an attempt to pressure Hamas into stopping rocket fire from the strip into Israel.

The truce is due to come into effect at 0600 (0300 GMT) on Thursday.

**If anybody does anything, they will be doing it on their own**

Ahmed Yousef  
Hamas official

This stage of the deal envisages a halt to hostilities and a partial reopening of Gaza's borders.

A second stage of the plan would focus on the return of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and on a deal to reopen the main Rafah crossing into Egypt.

Hamas official Ahmed Yousef told the BBC he hoped that the ceasefire would lead to a further opening of the crossing points from Israel into Gaza, and an increase in the number of supplies.

"I am confident that everybody will abide by what we've agreed. All the groups which went to Cairo gave their okay to the ceasefire. If anybody does anything, they will be doing it on their own," he said.

He said that the aim now was to push ahead talks on a prisoner exchange, as well as a new round of talks in Cairo between the rival Palestinian factions of Fatah and Hamas.

Egypt, which has worked for months to bring the two sides to an agreement, said both sides had accepted the first stage of the deal, state-owned news agency Mena reported.

"Egypt hopes that the two sides will exert all efforts to bring the calm to a success," the agency quoted a senior official as saying.

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The aftermath of Israeli air strikes in southern Gaza

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