

Israel Delays Second Phase of Gaza Agreement ahead of Netanyahu–Trump Meeting

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Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump. (Design: Palestine Chronicle)

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Netanyahu has conditioned progress toward the second phase of the Gaza ceasefire agreement on the recovery of the final Israeli body held in the Strip, ahead of talks with Trump.

Israeli media reported on Thursday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made the recovery of the final Israeli body held in the Gaza Strip a condition for advancing to the second phase of the ceasefire agreement aimed at ending the war.

According to Israel's Channel 13, a small ministerial council is currently convening to prepare for Netanyahu's upcoming meeting with US President Donald Trump, scheduled to take place in Miami, Florida. This will mark Netanyahu's fifth visit to the United States since January, with Israeli media reporting that the trip will run from December 28 to January 4.

In connection with the visit, Israel's Channel 15 reported that Netanyahu plans to discuss four main issues with Trump: Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran.

Israeli outlets also reported that Stephen Witkoff, Trump's envoy, informed Israeli officials ahead of the meeting that there is an expectation to move forward with the second phase of the agreement at the beginning of next month.

Israel is reportedly conditioning the start of second-phase negotiations on the recovery of the body of Ran Goeli, described as the last Israeli detainee held by the Palestinian resistance. Hamas has stated that retrieving the body may take time due to the scale of destruction across Gaza.

Since the first phase of the ceasefire began on October 10, Palestinian factions have handed over 20 Israeli captives alive and the bodies of 27 others. The body of Goeli remains unaccounted for, with search efforts ongoing.

Two-Stage Agreement

On October 9, Israel and Hamas reached a two-stage ceasefire agreement for Gaza, mediated by Egypt, Qatar, and Turkiye, and backed by the United States. The agreement was based on a 20-point plan presented by Trump to bring the war to an end.

The first phase came into effect the following day. However, Israel has violated the agreement hundreds of times and failed to meet several of its obligations, particularly those related to humanitarian access and the entry of aid. According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, these violations resulted in the killing of more than 400 Palestinians, despite Hamas's stated commitment to the ceasefire.

Israeli authorities have also delayed the transition to the second phase, citing the continued absence of the soldier's body, even as Palestinian factions continue search efforts amid the widespread destruction caused by the Israeli war on Gaza.

The second phase of Trump's ceasefire proposal includes provisions for the formation of a temporary technocratic committee to administer Gaza, overseeing reconstruction, establishing a peace council, deploying an international force, further Israeli troop withdrawals from the Strip, and the disarmament of Hamas.

(PC, AJA, Israeli Media)