

Christians seeking shelter in church killed in Gaza

October 20, 2023

Early reports indicate an overnight explosion at St. Porphyrius Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza City killed at least 40 people—including 19 Christians—who were seeking shelter from bomb blasts, [International Christian Concern reported](#) Oct. 20.

About 500 people—including members of Gaza's Christian minority—had been sheltering in the church since Israel began airstrikes on Gaza in response to the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel.

Israeli military said a portion of the church building was damaged in a strike on a militant command and control center that was used in carrying out attacks on Israel, and it was reviewing the incident, [Reuters reported](#).

The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem said the church was hit by an Israeli airstrike, and it issued a statement expressing its “strongest condemnation” of the action.

“The Patriarchate emphasizes that targeting churches and their institutions, along with the shelters they provide to protect innocent citizens, especially children and women who have lost their homes due to Israeli airstrikes on residential areas over the past thirteen days, constitutes a war crime that cannot be ignored,” the statement said.

“Despite the evident targeting of the facilities and shelters of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and other churches—including the Episcopal Church of Jerusalem Hospital, other schools, and social institutions—the Patriarchate, along with the other churches, remain committed to fulfilling its religious and moral duty in providing assistance, support, and refuge to

those in need, amidst continuous Israeli demands to evacuate these institutions of civilians and the pressures exerted on the churches in this regard.

“The Patriarchate stresses that it will not abandon its religious and humanitarian duty, rooted in its Christian values, to provide all that is necessary in times of war and peace alike.”

‘Squeezed between two hammers’

Prior to the explosion, International Christian Concern officials had expressed little confidence in the safety of individuals seeking shelter in Gazan churches. In addition to St. Porphyrios Greek Orthodox Church, civilians also sheltered at the Holy Family Roman Catholic Church. None were known to be sheltering at Gaza Baptist Church.

“There’s a very high likelihood of the Christian places getting hit as the conflict continues, in some way, whether it be politicized or not,” Joseph Daniel, ICC’s regional manager for the Middle East and North Africa, told [Baptist Press](#) Oct. 18.

“I have very little confidence (of the Christians’ safety) and a lot of fear that something like this would happen. That, just like it happened at the hospital, that a church or that Christians would be affected. And regardless of where the political blame is laid, it doesn’t do any help for those Christians who are suffering.”

Daniel urged Christians to pray for fellow believers in Gaza.

“For Palestinian Christians in general, but really Gazans, they’re being squeezed between two hammers politically and socially in their everyday reality,” Daniel said.

“Really only a miracle of God, our prayers and a quick de-escalation, some

kind of peace agreement are really the only things I think would be constructive in helping this very small and already beleaguered Christian community in Gaza. They really need our prayers.”

With reporting by Diana Chandler of Baptist Press.

EDITOR'S NOTE: While the Israel Defense Forces acknowledged a strike targeting a Hamas control center caused damage to the church, “It is important to clarify that the church was not the target of the strike.”