

Two more Gaza hostages freed

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Online Desk: Gaza's Hamas rulers on Monday freed two more women abducted from Israel during the October 7 attacks, with their elderly husbands still being held among more than 200 hostages.

The Palestinian Islamist group's military wing said the two elderly women, identified as Yocheved Lifshitz and Nurit Cooper, had been freed for "compelling humanitarian" reasons following mediation by Qatar and Egypt.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed the two women's identities, saying they were Israeli citizens aged 85 and 79, respectively, and residents of the Nir Oz kibbutz.

It said their husbands, both in their 80s, were still in captivity, among more than 200 hostages still held by Hamas.

Four women have now been freed in three days.

The pair were taken to the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt, according to Israeli media.

After being flown in by Israeli helicopter, the two released hostages arrived at a Tel Aviv medical centre, where the Israeli government said their families were waiting for them.

One was carried in on a stretcher and the other in a wheelchair, according to an AFP journalist at the scene.

– 'I don't know where I was taken' –

"I don't know where I was taken," Lifshitz said of her abduction, according to the Israeli news site Ynet.

"They loaded me on a motorcycle sideways so I wouldn't fall, with one terrorist holding me from the front and the other from behind."

"They crossed the border fence into the Gaza Strip, and at first they held me in the town of Abesan," she said.

"After that, I don't know where I was taken."

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it had also helped with the case and the transportation of the women out of Gaza.

"We facilitated the release of 2 more hostages, transporting them out of Gaza this evening," it wrote late Monday on X, formerly Twitter.

"Our role as a neutral intermediary makes this work possible & we are ready to facilitate any future release."

American mother and daughter Judith and Natalie Raanan were freed on Friday, with the militants also citing humanitarian reasons and efforts by Qatar and Egypt.

Israel on Monday increased the number of confirmed hostages to 222 people seized when Hamas gunmen crossed the border and attacked kibbutz communities, towns and military bases in southern Israel.

Israeli officials say the attackers killed 1,400 people in the nation's worst-ever attack.

Israel hit back with a blistering bombing campaign which Gaza's Hamas-run health authority says has now killed more than 5,000 people.

The hostages — among them babies, children, pregnant women, soldiers and many foreign nationals — have become a major issue for the Israeli government as it justifies its bombardment of “ Hamas targets ” in Gaza.

But the spiralling Palestinian death toll has drawn international alarm.

Military spokesman Daniel Hagari on Monday said infantry and tank raids into Gaza during the night had sought to “ locate and search for any information available about the hostages ”.

When asked later about reports that more hostages could be released, Hagari refused to comment, saying only: “ We are doing all that we can to free all hostages no matter the nationality. ”