

Abbas calls for international presence in Gaza

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The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has called for sending international observers to Gaza and urged the leadership of the Palestinian enclave to accept Egypt's ceasefire initiative.

"International presence is needed in the Gaza Strip," President Mahmoud Abbas said during a news conference in Cairo, following talks with the Egyptian president.

Abbas insisted on deploying international observers inside Gaza to protect Palestinians and not on its border with Egypt as Israel wants this.

The Palestinian president also said the PNA does not object to international presence in the West Bank.

He called on radical movement Hamas, which seized Gaza in the summer of 2007, to immediately accept the Egypt-sponsored plan, under which Israel is to halt its military operation in Gaza and Palestinian militants are to stop rocket barrages on Israeli territories. A pause in hostilities would allow humanitarian aid into Gaza and prepare talks on a durable truce.

Abbas said contacts are continuing with Israel, which, however, is still to agree to withdraw from Gaza.

According to Palestinian health authorities, the Israeli operation that started on December 27 has so far killed over 800 people in Gaza, while another 3,310 people were wounded.

Israel's casualties are estimated at 13 people, including 10 servicemen.

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