Dramatic day ushers in a fragile Israel-Hamas ceasefire after 15 months of war



months of war One of the three Israeli hostages released on Sunday in Gaza is handed over by Hamas fighters to a member of the Red Cross. Image source,Getty Images Image caption,Doron Steinbrecher, one of the Israeli hostages released on

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One of the three Israeli hostages released on Sunday in Gaza is handed over by Hamas fighters to a member of the Red Cross.
Image source,Getty Images
Image caption,Doron Steinbrecher, one of the Israeli hostages released After 15 months of war that began with a brutal attack on Israel by Hamas and ended with much of the Gaza Strip levelled by Israel, a ceasefire came into effect on Sunday that saw three women hostages released from Gaza and 90 Palestinians freed from Israeli jails in return

For two tense hours on Sunday morning, the ceasefire looked as though it might falter from the very outset. Hamas failed to provide the names of the three hostages it planned to release, prompting Israel to postpone the ceasefire and continue its air strikes on Gaz

In what should have been the first hours of peace, from 08:30 local time (06:30 GMT), at least 19 Palestinians were killed by the strikes and 36 more were wounded, the Hamas-run Civil Defence agency said. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said they had struck "a number of terror targets

The three hostages' names were eventually sent by Hamas to Israel, via an intermediary, and Israeli military action in Gaza ceased for the first time since a brief, week-long ceasefire and hostage exchange back in November 20At 11:19, Majed al-Ansari, the spokesman for the foreign ministry of Qatar, which has helped broker the ceasefire deal, wrote on X that the final obstacles had been cleared "and thus the ceasefire has begunSix hours later, three Israeli hostages – Romi Gonen, 24, Doron Steinbrecher, 31, and Emily Damari, 28, who is a dual British citizen – were handed over by Hamas to the Red Cross in Gaza and then to the Israeli military. TV coverage showed chaotic scenes in Gaza City's Saraya Square as crowds massed around the vehicle carrying the hostages and Hamas fighters struggled to push the people back.

There was a brief glimpse of the three women as they were taken from the van, amid the surging crowds. From the handover point in Gaza they were driven by the IDF to the nearby Re'im military base in southern Israel to be met by their mothers.

Extensive planning by the IDF had gone into the delicate handover, with military medics and psychologists readied for the first stages of the process at a reception centre designed to ease the hostages' transition.

From Re'im, they were transferred by helicopter to the Sheba Medical Centre near Tel Aviv to be reunited with their wider families and receive further medical attention. Two of the three reportedly suffered gunshot wounds in the attack on 7 October 2023, when Hamas killed about 1,200 people and took 251 hostage23".a.