Palestinians hoping to return to Gaza's Rafah find city in ruins



As an Israel-Hamas ceasefire begins, rubble is all that's left in large swaths of southern Gaza's Rafah

Palestinian farmer Abd al-Sattari owned two houses in Gaza's Rafah. For the nine months since Israeli forces invaded the southern city, he has been forced into displacement. The 53-year-old had lived with the hope that if one house got hit in one of the Israeli attacks, which have flattened more than 70 percent of the territory, the other one would stay standing to take his family back in when the war finally ended.

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On Sunday, even before the ceasefire came into effect, Abd took his eldest son Mohammed and left the rest of their family in their displacement tent in al-Mawasi, on Gaza's southwestern coast. They rushed to one property, then the next, to face the grim reality: both his houses – one in the area of Shaboura and the other in Mirage – had been reduced to rubble. Abd's hopes of returning to normalcy have been shattered.

The much-anticipated ceasefire agreement came into effect on Sunday morning, bringing what Palestinians hope will be an end to a gruesome war that has killed more than 46,900 people, demolished much of the besieged enclave and driven more than 2 million people into displacement. Even before the ceasefire began, hundreds of families were rushing back to Rafah, having fled after the Israeli invasion, with their few belongings packed into vehicles, animal-pulled carts and bikes.