Hamas handed over seven Israeli hostages to the International Committee of the Red Cross today – the start of a comprehensive exchange involving a total of 20 live hostages and around 1,900 Palestinian prisoners.

After months of negotiations mediated by the USA and pressure from US President Donald Trump, Qatar and Egypt, Hamas has handed over seven hostages to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

According to the Jüdische Allgemeine, those released include Alon Ohel, Matan Angrest, Eitan Mor, Omri Miran, Guy Gilboa-Dallal, Gali Berman and Ziv Berman. She writes: “The announcement was greeted with great jubilation in the hostages’ square in Tel Aviv. Thousands have gathered there since five o’clock in the morning to cheer the release of the men.”

The Red Cross is to take the released men to Israeli-controlled territory in Gaza. At the Re’im military base on the border with Gaza, the men will undergo psychological and medical examinations before being reunited with their families, according to the Jüdische Allgemeine. They will then be distributed to three hospitals in Israel for medical examinations, according to the Jüdische Allgemeine. Further releases are to follow in the coming hours. Once the handover is complete, the Red Cross convoy will return to Gaza to recover the bodies of the 28 hostages who were murdered in captivity.

In return, Israel undertakes to release around 1,950 Palestinian prisoners – including 250 who were sentenced to life imprisonment for deadly attacks and a further 1,700 who have been arrested since the start of the war. They are not to be handed over to the Palestinian authorities until all living hostages are safely in Israeli hands. The exchange is part of a ceasefire worked out by the USA, which has largely held for several days.international reactions are cautiously optimistic. The USA and the EU speak of a “critical moment on the road to peace”, while Israeli families of the hostages hope that their loved ones will soon return in full. Nevertheless, the situation remains fragile: it is still unclear whether all commitments will be met and whether extremists on both sides could sabotage the agreement.