

Israel assaults Rafah, where one million Gaza refugees are sheltering with nowhere to go

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Israel has begun an assault on Rafah, the southernmost city in Gaza, where over one million people are seeking shelter, unable to go anywhere safe.

Footage published by AFP showed widespread strikes throughout the city on the Egyptian border Tuesday. Last week, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant pledged: “We are achieving our missions in Khan Younis, and we will also reach Rafah and eliminate terror elements that threaten us.”

On Tuesday, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) spokesperson Jens Laerke warned that the assault on Rafah could constitute a war crime. “Intensified hostilities in Rafah in this situation could lead to large-scale loss of civilian lives, and we must do everything possible within our power to avoid that,” he stated.

“We, as the UN and member states of the UN, can bear witness,” Laerke said. “We can make clear what the law says: under international humanitarian law, indiscriminate bombing of densely populated areas may amount to war crimes.”

As Israel continued its push into Rafah, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Israel Tuesday, in his fifth visit to Israel in the past three months. As part of his visit to the region, Blinken met with Saudi Arabia’s crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, with the aim of “normalizing” relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The United States is fully complicit in Israel’s genocide in Gaza. In the face of clear evidence of systematic war crimes and openly genocidal rhetoric by Israeli officials, Blinken and other US officials have declared their unlimited support for “Israel’s right to defend itself” and have insisted that there are “no red lines” for the number of civilians Israel will be allowed to kill.

Approximately half of Gaza’s population has been forced into the city of Rafah, causing its population to swell. “Refugees facing acute shortages of food, water, shelter, and medicine are still pouring into Rafah as fighting worsens nearby,” UN News reported.

Between February 5 and 6, 107 Palestinians were killed, with 143 injured by Israeli attacks, according to Gaza’s Ministry of Health.

Since October 7, Israel has killed 35,096 Palestinians in Gaza, a number that includes 13,642 children and 7,656 women, according to the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor. The vast majority of those killed are civilians, with 30,571 non-combatants having lost their lives. A further 67,240 people are reported to have been injured.

An estimated 2 million Palestinians have been displaced. Israel has destroyed 79,200 homes and damaged another 207,000, rendering the vast majority of the population homeless, even if they were allowed to return to their shattered homes.

The healthcare system in Gaza also has been devastated, with 309 healthcare professionals killed and 380 injured. Some 235 healthcare facilities, including 26 hospitals and 63 clinics, have been destroyed or damaged, along with 146 ambulances.

In a statement, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) said “84 percent of health facilities in Gaza have been affected by attacks.” The agency added that only four of its 22 facilities in Gaza remain operational, amid relentless attacks targeting humanitarian workers by Israeli forces.

In a report published Tuesday, the Euro-Med monitor revealed widespread “forced nudity, sexual harassment, and threats of sexual torture” of detainees by Israeli forces.

The organization reported that “testimonies from a group of recently released detainees who spent varying lengths of time in Israeli jails and detention centers ... confirmed that they were subjected to severe beatings, dog attacks, strip searches, and denial of food and bathroom access, among other cruel practices that amount to torture.”

The report continued: “The most concerning testimonies that Euro-Med Monitor received concern female detainees who were directly sexually harassed. The female detainees, who preferred to remain unidentified due to safety concerns, said that Israeli soldiers had harassed them by touching their genitals as well as making them remove their headscarves.”

Euro-Med “confirmed that the soldiers forced the female detainees and their families into providing information about others by threatening to indecently assault and even rape them.”

On Monday, a *New York Times* investigation compiled social media videos of Israeli forces filming themselves destroying civilian infrastructure in Gaza.

According to the *Times*, the videos “capture soldiers vandalizing local shops and school classrooms, making derogatory comments about Palestinians, bulldozing what appear to be civilian areas and calling for the building of Israeli settlements in Gaza, an inflammatory idea that is promoted by some far-right Israeli politicians.”

The UN warned that attacks on hospitals are continuing and intensifying. “For over two weeks, heavy fighting continues to be reported near Nasser and Al Amal hospitals in Khan Younis, jeopardizing the safety of medical staff, the wounded and the sick, as well as thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) seeking refuge at both hospitals.”

On February 6, the UN continued, the Ministry of Health in Gaza announced that Israeli forces have intensified their siege of Nasser Hospital, endangering the lives of 300 medical personnel, 450 wounded, and some 10,000 displaced people seeking shelter in the hospital compound.

Meanwhile, hunger is soaring throughout Gaza. According to the UN, screenings of 3,500 children aged 6 months to 59 months found that nearly 10 percent were facing acute malnutrition, a 12-fold increase since the start of Israel’s offensive. In northern Gaza, the figures are even higher, with 15 percent of children

reporting severe malnutrition.

Even as the death toll from the Gaza genocide mounts, further questions are being raised about the role of Israeli forces in the killing of Israeli citizens.

On Tuesday, *Haaretz* reported that the Israeli military has opened an investigation into the deaths of 12 hostages in a house in Kibbutz Be’eri who were killed as a result of shelling by Israeli forces in the initial invasion by Hamas on October 7.

Haaretz reported on “suspicions that Brig. Gen. Barak Hiram, the commander of the army’s 99th Division who led the fighting in the kibbutz, ordered a tank crew to fire on Cohen’s house even though he knew hostages were being held there.”



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