

Israel announces plans for ethnic cleansing of Rafah

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On Friday, the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a statement asserting that the prime minister had ordered the Israeli military to submit a plan for the forced evacuation of the southern town of Rafah, where one million refugees from other areas of Gaza have been driven.

Israel's attack on Rafah would be a "massive operation," Netanyahu's office said.

Given that Israel has ordered the people of Gaza to evacuate effectively all other areas of the region, the clear implication is that the population will be expelled into the Sinai Desert, with or without the permission of Egypt.

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian Permanent Observer to the UN, said Friday that "if the Israeli army ... begins the so-called evacuating [of] the people from Rafah, where would they go?"

"They're saying they're not allowing them to go to the north. They don't want them to stay in Rafah—it doesn't require a nuclear physicist to come to the conclusion that there is only one place for them to go, which is the Sinai Peninsula."

In October, Israel ordered over one million people in northern Gaza to the south, calling it a "safe zone" and assuring them that they would not be bombed there. Then, in November, Israeli forces ordered the evacuation of the city of Khan Younis, forcing civilians in the area to flee south to Rafah. One after another, each of these "safe areas" have been bombed and then attacked by ground troops.

As a result, approximately 86 percent of Gaza's population—1.7 million out of 2.3 million people—are internally displaced, with the majority of those sheltering in Rafah. The trapped refugees are facing famine and lack access to clean water, hygiene and medical care.

In a statement, Stéphane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary-General António Guterres, stated, "We would not in any way support forced displacement, which goes against international law." This statement effectively declares that the Netanyahu government has expressed intent to carry out ethnic cleansing.

The determination of the Netanyahu government to carry out the forced expulsions of the Palestinians from Rafah has produced hypocritical statements from the imperialist backers of the Israeli genocide. US President Joe Biden, speaking to reporters, said that Netanyahu's "conduct of the response in Gaza in the Gaza Strip has been over the top."

The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borell stated, "Reports of an Israeli military offensive on Rafah are alarming. ... It would have catastrophic consequences, worsening the already dire humanitarian situation and the unbearable civilian toll."

Regardless of such statements, the United States and European imperialist powers have systematically enabled Israel to carry out the genocide and ethnic cleansing of Gaza, with the United States repeatedly declaring that there are no "red lines" for the number of Palestinians allowed to be killed.

Reuters reported Friday that Egypt has massively expanded the number of military personnel stationed on its borders with Gaza, deploying 40 tanks and armored personnel carriers to the area over the past two weeks.

Ahead of the expected ground offensive, Israeli forces intensified their aerial bombardment of the city.

"There is a sense of growing anxiety, growing panic in Rafah," Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the UNRWA agency, said Friday, adding, "People have no idea where to go."

Gaza's Ministry of Health said Friday that 27,947 Palestinians have been killed over the past three

months, with thousands more unaccounted for. Between the afternoons of February 8 and 9, 107 Palestinians in Gaza were killed, the ministry said.

Even as Israel presses its assault on Gaza, it is systematically destroying buildings throughout the Gaza Strip, targeting in particular all structures that are near the Israeli border.

In a statement Friday, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk declared, “Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) are reportedly destroying all buildings within the Gaza Strip that are within a kilometre of the Israel-Gaza fence, clearing the area with the objective of creating a ‘buffer zone.’ Destructions carried out to create a ‘buffer zone’ for general security purposes do not appear consistent with the narrow ‘military operations’ exception set out in international humanitarian law. Since late October 2023, my Office has recorded widespread destruction and demolition by the IDF of civilian and other infrastructure, including residential buildings, schools, and universities in areas in which fighting is not or no longer taking place.”

The statement added, “Israel has not provided cogent reasons for such extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure.

“Such destruction of homes and other essential civilian infrastructure also entrenches the displacement of communities that were living in these areas prior to the escalation in hostilities and appears to be aimed at or has the effect of rendering the return of civilians to these areas impossible. I remind the authorities that forcible transfer of civilians may constitute a war crime.”

But this is precisely the plan of the Israeli government, operating with the full military and logistical support of the Biden administration and the European governments. Having seized upon the October 7 attacks as a pretext, Israel has moved to implement a long-term plan to render Gaza uninhabitable and either kill or expel its population. The assault on Rafah will mark a new stage in this vast crime.



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