

Half a million Palestinians forced to flee latest Israeli military attacks

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More than half a million Palestinians have been forced to flee the southern city of Rafah and areas of northern Gaza over the past week, according to the UN, as the Israeli military dramatically escalates its war of extermination.

The UN relief agency for Palestinians (UNRWA) reported that around 450,000 people have been driven out of Rafah—a city whose population had been swollen to 1.3 million by a huge influx of people escaping the Israeli military onslaught elsewhere in Gaza.

In a Twitter/X post yesterday, the UNRWA underscored the desperate situation facing men, women, and children who have been pushed from one war zone to another. “People face constant exhaustion, hunger, and fear. Nowhere is safe. An immediate #ceasefire is the only hope,” it declared.

Israeli forces have seized control of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt and blocked the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel, effectively cutting off aid convoys into southern Gaza. No food has entered via these crossings over the past week, and only a trickle is coming into Gaza via newly opened crossings in the north.

According to the UN, some 1.1 million Palestinians face catastrophic levels of hunger—that is, they are on the brink of starvation. Last week, the head of the UN World Food Program (WFP) Cindy McCain confirmed that northern Gaza had already entered a full-blown famine as judged by an extreme lack of food, acute malnutrition among children, and daily deaths from hunger. Now the Israeli military has issued evacuation orders for northern Gaza, where it has renewed operations in areas that it had previously claimed to have cleared. UN deputy spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters Monday that at least 100,000 people have been forced to leave so far.

In other words, in the last week alone, more than half a million people, nearly a quarter of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million, have been displaced.

In a statement released yesterday, Secretary-General António Guterres said he was “appalled by the escalation of military activity in and around Rafah by the Israel Defense Forces,” adding that it was impeding aid supplies and worsening “an already dire situation.” He called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the reopening of the Rafah border crossing.

UN spokesman Haq said:

The families being displaced from Rafah are arriving at sites that lack shelter, latrines, and water points. However, it is impossible to improve the situation at displacement sites if supplies can’t enter Gaza—and if we lack the fuel to transport them inside Gaza to the families who need them.

Abeer Etefa, a spokeswoman for the World Food Program, said it was distributing food from its remaining stocks in the areas of Khan Younis in the south and Deir al-Balah farther north, where many of those escaping Rafah had fled.

Inside Rafah itself, only two organizations partnering with WFP were still able to distribute food. No bakeries were operating. “The majority of distributions have stopped due to the evacuation orders, displacement, and running out of food,” she said.

The hostility of the Zionist regime and the military to the United Nations and aid workers is epitomized by the killing of a UN security officer and the wounding of another when an Israeli tank fired on a UN vehicle near

Rafah on Monday.

Despite denials by the Israeli military, the white UN vehicle was clearly marked, and Israeli authorities had been informed of its route to the European hospital in Rafah in advance. The UN staff member killed was Waibhav Anil Kale, a retired Indian army colonel. The injured staffer was Yara Dababneh, from Jordan.

The incident marks the first time that a UN international staff member has been killed in the US-backed Israeli war in Gaza since October 7. The UNRWA says that at least 188 of its local employees have been killed since the start of the conflict.

In a report issued yesterday, US-based Human Rights Watch said the Israeli military has carried out at least eight strikes on aid workers and their convoys, killing at least 15 people, including two children, since October 7. In each case, aid groups had provided details of their routes in advance to Israeli authorities.

The most widely known case was the killing of seven aid workers with World Central Kitchen in April in multiple Israeli airstrikes on a convoy of clearly marked vehicles whose route was known. Amid widespread international outrage, Israel dismissed two officers and reprimanded three more, claiming they had breached military rules of engagement.

In another incident on Monday, Israeli police reportedly stood by while Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank attacked aid trucks bound for Gaza. “The settlers offloaded and vandalized the vehicles at the Tarqumiya checkpoint and near the barrier by Beit 'Awwa,” UN spokesman Haq said. Only later were several of those involved arrested.

The horrific living conditions in Gaza continue to worsen. Oxfam has warned of widespread disease outbreaks in Gaza due to an estimated \$210 million worth of damage to water and sanitation infrastructure, mass displacement and the onset of summer.

The organization said in a statement:

Oxfam staff in Gaza have described piles of human waste and rivers of sewage in the streets, which people are having to jump between. They also reported people having to drink dirty water and children being bitten by insects swarming around the sewage.

Doctors Without Borders announced on Tuesday that a field hospital it was supplying in Rafah has been forced to shut down due to Israeli military operations. The 60-bed Rafah Indonesian Field Hospital, which had been treating the wounded since December, pulled out its 180 staff. The 22 patients have been moved to other facilities or sent home.

According to the UN, 24 of Gaza’s 36 hospitals have shut down, with the rest only partially operating. Nine field hospitals had been set up, including six in Rafah. However, as Doctors Without Borders explained, field hospitals cannot “cope with a massive influx of wounded civilians, on top of overwhelming medical needs. They can in no way replace a functional health system.”

According to local health officials in Gaza yesterday, at least 35,173 people have been killed and 79,061 wounded in Israeli attacks since October 7. In the previous 24 hours, at least 82 Palestinians had been killed—the highest death toll in a single day in many weeks.



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