



## SOS Alert Gaza - Update #5 - The Genocidal Attack on Rafah

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The Lemkin Institute is horrified by the decision of the Israeli government to carry out a military operation on the city of Rafah, the southernmost city in the Gaza Strip. Rafah is currently a shelter for more than 1.3 million Palestinians who have already been displaced by the advancing Israeli army. We strongly condemn the Israeli government's decision and express grave concern for the lives of Palestinians in overcrowded Rafah, as there are no places left to flee in Gaza.

As the Lemkin Institute pointed out in its statement from December 29, 2023 on "Why We Call the Israeli Attack on Gaza Genocide," "When considering the [genocidal] impact of Israel's retaliation, the sequence of events is notable: first, [the order for] evacuations of Northern Gaza, followed by bombing of infrastructure, hospitals, schools, etc., in that region. Subsequently, a similar pattern emerges in Central Gaza, ultimately pushing Palestinians into progressively smaller sections of Southern Gaza, where they also continue to be bombed. It is evident that [Israel's genocidal] rhetoric has translated into action, rendering larger and larger areas in the Gaza Strip essentially unlivable for the Palestinian civilians. According to Israeli newspapers, at a Likud Party meeting on 26 December, Prime Minister Netanyahu told his supporters that he is looking for countries to 'absorb' Palestinians from Gaza, suggesting that he plans to force the displacement of the entire population."

On February 9, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the IDF to prepare a plan for a military operation in Rafah and the evacuation of civilians from the area. The order came following US President Joe Biden's criticism of Israeli operations in Gaza, saying that the scale of the attacks "has been over the top," noting that "there are a lot of innocent people who are starving. There are a lot of innocent people who are in trouble and dying. And it's got to stop."

Rafah, "the last refuge for displaced Palestinians," is located at the border with Egypt and was previously designated as a safe zone for Palestinians fleeing from the north, the center, and recently, Khan Younis City in the south. Palestinians have run out of safe spaces and are stuck between the advancing Israeli army and the heavily militarized Egyptian border.

Netanyahu's declaration to extend the scale of military operations to Rafah provoked condemnation around the globe. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed his concern over the coming Rafah operation, stating that "such an action would exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold regional consequences." The European Union's Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, reiterated the EU's position condemning the planned Rafah offensive, stating "an Israeli offensive on Rafah would lead to an unspeakable humanitarian catastrophe and grave tensions with Egypt." International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Karim Khan expressed grave concern regarding Israel's assault on Rafah and noted that the ICC will be investigating.

Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia have each strongly condemned the continued displacement of Palestinians, conjuring painful memories of the 1948 Nakba. The three nations have all rejected Israeli attempts to evict Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and renewed their calls for a ceasefire. Egypt proclaimed that any operations in Rafah may result in a suspension of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The planned operations in Rafah are viewed as an attempt to forcibly displace Gaza's Palestinians to the dangerous Sinai Peninsula. Forcibly displacing Palestinians into the Sinai constitutes a genocidal act and is a violation of Egypt's sovereignty and security. Jordan warned against "the dangerous consequences" of the attack on Rafah. Saudi Arabia issued a statement in which it labeled Israeli actions as "deliberate violations of international and humanitarian laws," stressing "the need for the United Nations Security Council to meet soon to prevent Israel from causing an imminent humanitarian disaster." Doctors Without Borders, an NGO that operates on the ground in Gaza, also called on the UN "to take concrete action to bring about a complete and sustained ceasefire," stating that "political rhetoric is not enough."

Only a few hours after Netanyahu ordered the planning of a ground operation in Rafah, the Israeli army conducted several airstrikes within the city. The recent series of intense airstrikes on February 12 killed more than 100 people, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society reported. Together with the recent suspension of UNRWA's funding and the potential end of its activities in the Strip, the attacks in Rafah have worsened the already horrific humanitarian situation in the area, imposing acute anxiety on the residents who are scared for their uncertain future. Amid the impending assault on Rafah, the death toll across the Gaza Strip stands at over 28,000, with nearly 70,000 injured and more than 85% of residents internally displaced.

We call on governments backing Israel, namely the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and other Western nations, to leverage their support and push Israel to suspend its assault on Rafah. In this same vein, the Lemkin Institute calls on the UN Security Council to urgently step in and enforce an immediate ceasefire to prevent another massacre and the forced displacement of Palestinians. The lives and well-being of Palestinians must be protected at all costs. The

genocide must be stopped, and humanitarian assistance must be allowed into the Gaza Strip. Only a political solution will bring long-term peace and stability to the region.

We reiterate our support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people. We cannot afford more devastation and loss of human life in Gaza.