

World leaders fail to act as Israeli invasion of Rafah worsens humanitarian catastrophe

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Despite repeated calls on Israel from heads of state, UN officials and humanitarian NGOs to refrain from expanding its ground offensive to Rafah, Israeli troops entered the governorate on May 7. Over 1.5 million people, including 600,000 children, are at serious risk; more than [450,000](#) Palestinians have fled Rafah since Israel first issued unlawful “evacuation orders” there on May 6. While the Israeli army has already taken control of urban areas inside Rafah, the issuance of new “evacuation orders” on May 11 is setting the stage for further advancement of the military invasion, which will lead to the total collapse of lifesaving services. The Israeli military offensive has interrupted the access of aid to Gaza through Rafah and Kerem Shalom / Karm Abu Salem crossings.

Third States have the responsibility to urgently act in bringing to an end, and pursue accountability for, the Grave Breaches of IHL taking place in Gaza. The first step for Third States in upholding their own legal obligations to ensure IHL is respected is to stop the Rafah invasion, open all land crossings and lift internal barriers for humanitarian access. As the main weapon provider for Israel’s military effort, the United States bears a significant responsibility for Israel’s IHL violations. In addition to halting the transfer of high payload bombs, the US should also use all its leverage to halt the ongoing military operation in Rafah. In fact, All suppliers of arms have to respect the [Human Rights Council resolution](#) voted on April 5 calling on them to cease the sale, transfer and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment to Israel. All states must act now to ensure an immediate and sustained ceasefire.

The Israeli military’s “evacuation orders” are unlawful and amount to forcible transfer, a grave violation of international humanitarian law (IHL). Israel has ordered hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to flee, without providing civilians and humanitarian actors clear information nor timeframe. IHL sets clear conditions for an evacuation to be lawful: the occupying power must ensure that these displacements are temporary and that displaced persons are provided with satisfactory conditions of hygiene, health, safety and nutrition, and members of the same family must not be separated. Israeli authorities have failed to meet any of these requirements. Already burdened by multiple displacements, people in Rafah are yet again being ordered to flee amidst destroyed infrastructure and streets contaminated by unexploded ordnances. Displaced individuals are seeking refuge in the Middle Area, Khan Younis and Al Mawasi despite high levels of destruction and lack all necessities to sustain life. The concept of "humanitarian safe zones" is void as areas previously designated as such have been targeted by bombing and ground operations.

While the relentless bombardment persists in Rafah, airstrikes and ground assaults are escalating in the North, leading to additional forcible displacement in the enclave.

The Israeli military ground invasion of Rafah is disrupting the humanitarian response, in breach of the UN Security Council resolutions 2720 and 2728 as well as the International Court of Justice's provisional measures ordering Israel to enable the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance. As a result of Israel's military activity in the northern governorates in previous months, humanitarian actors have been forced to relocate a significant portion of aid capacities in Rafah, including premises and warehouses. The Israeli offensive is now already forcing part of humanitarian staff and operations to close or to relocate again to other areas under extremely dangerous circumstances. Warehouses containing direly needed lifesaving aid in eastern Rafah remain inaccessible due to the presence of Israeli forces. Medical facilities in Rafah are shutting down one after another¹.

Every hour during which Israeli forces occupy the crossings of Rafah and Kerem Shalom / Karm Abu Salem condemns more Palestinians to starvation and denial of medical care. Israeli forces are completely preventing humanitarian aid and staff from using the Rafah crossing. The heavy militarization around the Kerem Shalom / Karm Abu Salem crossing resulting from the Israeli ground invasion does not provide the conditions for sustained movement of humanitarian convoys. These two crossings constitute the main critical lifeline for entry of aid into the enclave: their closures are plunging Gaza into an even larger humanitarian disaster. While the state of famine has been confirmed by the [World Food Program](#) in northern Gaza and the health system sinks deeper into collapse, stocks of critical aid provisions, including food, water, fuel and medical supplies are rapidly depleting. This already resulted in the closure of services essential to civilians' survival². The extremely limited reopening of the northern crossings or the prospect of a maritime route cannot be used as a rationale to justify diminishing access through southern land crossings.

The depletion of fuel poses a grave risk of halting humanitarian operations and basic services. The functioning of the whole humanitarian response depends on fuel, including to address priority needs of more than 1.7 million displaced persons. Urgently prioritizing the immediate entry of fuel is crucial to sustain what remains of Gaza's devastated health system and humanitarian response³.

¹ Al Najjar hospital, the largest health facility in the governorate, ceased operations as it is located in the area seized by Israeli forces, and Al Kuwaiti hospital is likely to follow as it is now included in the zone threatened by Israeli "evacuation orders".

² Eight out of the twelve bakeries of Southern Gaza, while more throughout the enclave are at risk of shutting operations down due to the lack of supplies and fuel. Medical evacuations have abruptly halted, directly condemning critical patients, including children, to death.

³ Of particular concern, at least 10 hospitals, 8 bakeries, 28 ambulances, 23 medical points and 17 primary health care centers [could stop operating](#) if fuel is not urgently allowed in the enclave. The lives of babies in intensive care, women with complicated pregnancies and births and trauma patients are hanging in the

Signatories:

ActionAid
Action Against Hunger
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
Amnesty International
A.M. Qattan Foundation
Anera
Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)
DanChurch Aid (DCA)
Humanity & Inclusion/ Handicap International (HI)
IM Swedish Development Partner
INTERSOS
Médecins du Monde International Network
Mennonite Central Committee
Mercy Corps
Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)
Norwegian People's Aid
Oxfam
Plan International
Relief International
War Child Alliance

Below are quotes from CEOs to pitch the statement to the media:

Florence RIGAL, President of Médecins du Monde France: "The Israeli military invasion of Rafah took us back to last October, when we had to stop almost all our operations. Our team had to flee Rafah, they do not know where to go. We had to close the two clinics we had opened there, where we were treating about 500 people a day. We are now setting up a new medical camp where people have fled to, but it will take a few days. In the meantime, people are left without access to healthcare. We have been warning for months that Israel must be stopped from entering Rafah or Gaza would face an even greater humanitarian catastrophe. The inaction of third countries is seen as a lack of concern for the consequences for the exhausted civilian population. It is unacceptable and immediate action must be taken to prevent further suffering."

Manuel PATROUILLARD, CEO at Humanity & Inclusion/ Handicap International (HI)

balance. The dire lack of fuel also endangers telecommunication, which is already negatively impacting humanitarian operations in Gaza.

“A long-lasting ceasefire is the only way to prevent further deaths, injuries, and human suffering, and escalation of the conflict in the region and to ensure preventive measures requested by the ICJ are put in place to prevent the crime of Genocide. It is the sole means to provide assistance to civilians and enable aid agencies with an operational presence to deliver aid.”

Jamil Sawalmeh, ActionAid Palestine Country Director | occupied Palestinian territory

"The only result of the ongoing ground invasion in Rafah is that more human suffering is caused. People are being forcibly pushed into the already overcrowded so-called "humanitarian zones," where many people cannot even find shelter. It is time to put maximum pressure on Israel and the international community to end the repeated forcible displacement of the people of Gaza. It is equally important to ensure the reopening of the Rafah crossing, which is the only lifeline for more than 2 million vulnerable people."

CMEP's Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon:

"Israel's gross violations have been documented extensively by international humanitarian and human rights organizations. In the May 10th report, the Biden administration acknowledged it was 'reasonable to assess' that Israel violated international law with the use of U.S. weapons but that the specific incidents could not be verified. Thus, weapons have continued to be sent from the United States. We call on the Biden administration to enforce the Leahy Laws and cease shipments of weapons of all kinds to Israel."

Anera President & CEO Sean Carroll:

"With all Gaza's borders and crossings occupied and controlled by Israel alone, continued attacks on aid convoys and humanitarian workers, and the resulting severe reduction in the amount of aid coming in to an increasingly desperate and vulnerable civilian population, coupled with the lack of a plan for the protection of civilians, the world must demand that Israel take immediate measures to significantly increase security and aid."