



Gaza: Israel must end its campaign of death and destruction



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PRESS RELEASE

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Jerusalem, Paris, Brussels, Barcelona, 28 May 2024 - As the United Nations Security Council meets today after Israel struck tent camps sheltering displaced people in designated “humanitarian zones” in southern Gaza, Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) calls for an immediate end to the Rafah offensive and the ongoing atrocities across the Gaza Strip. Israel’s military strategy of repeatedly launching attacks in densely populated areas inevitably leads to the mass killing of civilians.

“Civilians are being massacred. They are being pushed into areas they were told would be safe only to be subjected to relentless airstrikes and heavy fighting,” says Chris Lockyear, MSF Secretary General. “Entire families, made up of dozens of people, are crowded into tents and living in extremely difficult conditions. Over 900,000 people were forcibly displaced again as Israeli forces intensified their offensive on Rafah in early May.”

Today, 21 Palestinians were killed and 64 injured, according to local health authorities, after Israeli forces bombed another tent camp for displaced people in Al-Mawasi, west of Rafah in southern Gaza.

Medical staff and patients at an MSF-supported trauma stabilisation point in Tal Al-Sultan in Rafah were also forced to flee on the night of 27 May, as hostilities in the area intensified, effectively stopping all medical activities in the facility. This forced evacuation of yet another healthcare facility comes 24 hours after Israeli forces carried out an air strike on what they had designated as a “safe zone”, killing at least 49 people and wounding over 250 others. Staff at the stabilisation point recorded a mass casualty influx of 180 wounded people and 31 dead, with patients suffering from severe burns, shrapnel wounds, fractures, and other traumatic injuries. These patients were stabilised and referred to field hospitals located towards Al-Mawasi, further west, as there are no remaining functional trauma hospitals able to cope with such a mass casualty event.

“All of last night we heard clashes, bombings and rockets being fired. Nobody knows what exactly is happening,” says Dr Safa Jaber, an MSF gynaecologist who is living in the Tal Al-Sultan tent camp with her family. “We are scared for our children, scared for ourselves. We were not expecting this to happen suddenly. Where shall we go? We are struggling to find the basics that every human being needs to stay alive.”

Just last week, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Israel to “immediately” halt its military offensive in Rafah and to let in desperately needed humanitarian aid, and ensure it reaches those who need it. But Israel’s offensive in southern Gaza has since escalated, no amount of meaningful aid has entered the enclave since 6 May, and the pattern of systematic attacks on healthcare has continued. All countries supporting Israel’s military operations in these circumstances are morally and politically complicit. We call on countries, particularly the United States, United Kingdom, and allied European Union Member States, to do whatever in their power to influence Israel to stop the ongoing siege and continued attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Gaza.

Nearly eight months into this war, there is no longer a single healthcare facility in Gaza that has the capacity to handle a mass casualty event such as the one on 27 May. The closure of the MSF-supported trauma point in Tal Al-Sultan follows an air strike on the same day on Kuwaiti hospital in Rafah, which killed two staff and put the hospital out of service. Nearly all hospitals in Rafah have been forcibly evacuated, and are either out of service or barely functioning, leaving no possibility for the provision of or access to medical care.

“Hundreds of thousands of civilians are being subjected to a brutal and relentless demonstration of collective punishment,” says Karin Huster, MSF Project Medical Referent in Gaza. “Along with the bombings, the severe blockages of aid are making it impossible for us to help in a meaningful way. People are also dying because humanitarian workers are being prevented from doing their jobs.”

Israeli bombardments and heavy fighting also continue to devastate the north of the enclave, which is almost inaccessible for humanitarian workers. Hospitals in the north are under fire and have been subject to extensive destruction, including Al-Awda and Kamal Adwan hospitals, the latter of which was bombed by Israeli forces just today. Other hospitals such as Al-Aqsa hospital in Deir al Balah and Nasser hospital in Khan Younis have reported fuel shortages and may soon no longer be able to function.

We call for all warring parties to respect and protect medical facilities, their staff, and patients.

We call for Israel to immediately halt its offensive on Rafah and to open the Rafah crossing point to let in humanitarian and medical aid at scale.

We call for an immediate and sustained ceasefire throughout the Strip.