

A ground operation in Rafah will be nothing short of a tragedy beyond words

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Statement by Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

(New York, 30 April 2024) After almost seven months of brutal hostilities that have killed tens of thousands of people and maimed tens of thousands more, Gaza is bracing for even more suffering and misery.

The world has been appealing to the Israeli authorities for weeks to spare Rafah, but a ground operation there is on the immediate horizon.

For the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled to Gaza's southernmost point to escape disease, famine, mass graves and direct fighting, a ground invasion would spell even more trauma and death.

For agencies struggling to provide humanitarian aid despite the active hostilities, impassable roads, unexploded ordnance, fuel shortages, delays at checkpoints, and Israeli restrictions, a ground invasion would strike a disastrous blow.

We are in a race to stave off hunger and death, and we are losing.

Meanwhile, the remaining hostages are yet to be released. Famine is taking hold. The rules of war continue to be flouted.

Civilians must be protected, and their needs must be met.

We welcome Israel's recent reopening of the Erez crossing in northern Gaza to move aid from Ashdod port and Jordan. We also welcome efforts to bring in aid by sea. All aid deliveries must be facilitated and protected.

These improvements in bringing more aid into Gaza cannot be used to prepare for or justify a full-blown military assault on Rafah.

The simplest truth is that a ground operation in Rafah will be nothing short of a tragedy beyond words. No humanitarian plan can counter that. The rest is detail.