



Deadly Assault on Rafah and Imminent Forced Expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza in Continuing Nakba, Requires Urgent International Intervention

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Al-Haq, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) warn the international community that Israel's plans to expand its ground assault on Rafah would result in yet another mass forcible transfer over 1.4 million Palestinians currently sheltering in Rafah, and potentially in their mass deportation into Egypt. The announced plans to forcibly displace Palestinians from the last designated "safe zone" in the Gaza Strip, through severe acts of military violence, amounts to a continuing Nakba, and a genocidal act of forcible transfer causing bodily and mental harm. On 9 February 2024, it was publicly announced that Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, [ordered](#) the Israeli forces and security establishment to submit a plan to the Cabinet for "evacuating the population" from Rafah. Recent statements from top Israeli military officials and a pattern of military action on the ground strongly suggests an [imminent ground invasion](#) and assault on Rafah, reminiscent of the destruction inflicted on Khan Younis and throughout northern Gaza over the course of the last four months. In the immediate aftermath of Israeli Prime Minister's 9 February announcement that an invasion of Rafah was imminent, Israeli airstrikes in Rafah [killed at least 28 Palestinians](#), including ten children, the youngest of whom was a three-month-old baby. On the night of 12 February, Rafah experienced one of the deadliest Israeli bombing campaigns in recent months. Over the span of approximately two hours, Israeli attacks killed 68 Palestinians, including 19 children and 13 women. Many more bodies are still under the rubble. Among those killed were numerous internally displaced persons who had sought shelter in Rafah, many of whom were killed while asleep in their makeshift

tents. Hundreds more were injured. According to the initial information gathered by our field researchers, Israeli warplanes launched dozens of intense raids around 01:49 am on Monday, 12 February 2024. These airstrikes persisted for approximately two hours, targeting at least 15 residential buildings, two mosques, agricultural lands, and areas close to the Egyptian–Palestinian border. The bombardment of homes in the Al-Shaboura and Yibna neighbourhoods in Rafah refugee camp and other residential neighbourhoods in Rafah city occurred abruptly, catching residents off guard. Helicopters and gunboats were also involved in the attacks. Despite the International Court of Justice determining that Israel is plausibly committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and issuing provisional measures ordering Israel, amongst other things, to take all measures within its power to halt with immediate effect the commission of genocidal acts, Israel has intensified its air, land, and sea attacks across the Gaza Strip, including Rafah. According to our initial field information, from 1 to 10 February 2024, Israeli forces launched dozens of air attacks on Rafah, targeting 17 residential homes without warning the residents sheltering inside, and bombing civilians while they were on the move, resulting in the killing of 90 Palestinians, including 34 children, 18 women, and a journalist. Dozens more civilians were injured, some of whom had their limbs amputated, and many remain missing. The intensified assault on Rafah and impending forced transfer or deportation of Palestinians seeking shelter in the south of the Gaza Strip will lead to irreparable harm. More than 1.4 million Palestinians are sheltering in Rafah, in inhumane conditions amidst intense Israeli bombardment. Most Palestinians in Rafah are living in makeshift structures, tents, or enduring harsh winter conditions sleeping out in the open. Palestinians from across Gaza fled to Rafah at the command of the Israeli military on the instruction that Rafah was a designated [safe zone](#). The Rafah Governorate's population, which typically numbers around 270,000 people, has swelled to shelter at least [five times](#) its normal population in a matter of weeks. Despite the Israeli military pushing over one million Palestinians in Gaza further south into Rafah, Palestinians have not faced reprieve or relief from constant Israeli bombing and targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, as there is [no safe place](#) in Gaza. The intensified targeting of Rafah comes as the Israeli military continues to empty out Gaza City and forcibly displace its residents southward toward Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis. We warn that Israel's intentional and unconstrained attacks on Rafah will result in thousands of Palestinian civilians killed on a scale that has not been witnessed in the previous four months of Israel's genocidal military campaign against Gaza. It will force those who survive to be

forcibly pushed out of Gaza into Egypt. In *Prosecutor v. Popovic*, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) explained that “forcible transfer” is a “relevant consideration when assessing genocidal intent.” In *Prosecutor v. Krstic*, the ICTY considered that “forcible transfer could be an additional means by which to ensure the physical destruction of the Bosnian Muslim community in Srebrenica.” As such, forcing Palestinians further south to Rafah, and now, announcing the forced displacement of Palestinians in Rafah whether internally into smaller pockets of Gaza or into Egypt, with no basic necessities for survival, is further evidence of Israel’s genocidal intent. The forced mass displacement of Palestinians from Rafah is a continuing Nakba of the Palestinian people. In just four months, Israel’s genocidal acts of killing and displacement have surpassed that of the Nakba between 1947 and 1949, when around 15,000 Palestinians were killed and 800,000 Palestinians were [expelled](#). The majority of Palestinians in Gaza, approximately 70 percent, are refugees to whom Israel denies their right to return since the 1948 Nakba. Since 7 October 2023, Israel has killed more than 27,900 Palestinians and injured at least 67,000, amounting to four percent of the population in Gaza. Israeli security cabinet member and Agriculture Minister Avi Dichter stated in November that “We are now rolling out the [Gaza Nakba](#),” and that “there is no way to wage a war – as the IDF seeks to do in Gaza – with masses between the tanks and the soldiers.” Israeli policies since 1948 preventing the right of Palestinian refugees around the globe from returning to their homes, as well as Israeli policies to subjugate the Palestinian population in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, has created a coercive environment forcing the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Israel’s ongoing illegal military occupation, apartheid, and forced displacement of Palestinians are inherent to its settler-colonial enterprise and is intended to destroy Palestinians as a group in clear violation of the Palestinian people’s inalienable right of return and self-determination. The decades-long denial of Palestinian refugees right of return, coupled the latest campaign to cleanse Rafah of 1.4 million Palestinians is evidence of Israel’s genocide against the Palestinian people, and continuing Nakba. The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned of a “[gigantic tragedy](#)” in Rafah as Israel expands its offensive against the area. Guterres rejected the idea of permanently displacing Palestinians to Egypt, insisting that “we should push to avoid a tragedy, instead of pushing for things to facilitate a tragedy.” The United Nations humanitarian affairs and relief chief Martin Griffiths warned of “[unthinkable suffering](#)” amid Israel’s intention to displace 1.4 million Palestinians from Rafah, asking, “Where are they supposed to go? How are they

supposed to stay safe?” Our organisations urgently appeal to the international community to address these real and imminent dangers of expelling 1.4 million Palestinians, already dispossessed and displaced multiple times, permanently across the border into Egypt—in a final act of irreversible colonial settlement and erasure. In light of this, we urge the international community to:

- Call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire;
- Immediately apply a [two-way arms embargo](#) on Israel;
- Ensure Israel complies with the legally-binding provisional measures order of the International Court of Justice;
- Intervene immediately to protect the Palestinian people against permanent forced displacement and destruction;
- Employ all diplomatic and political efforts to ensure that the mass forcible deportation of Gaza’s civilian population into Egypt does not materialise;
- Ensure the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons at the earliest possible stage, particularly to the north;
- Ensure that during truces, Palestinians will be allowed to move freely within the Gaza Strip, including towards their homes in the north of the Gaza Strip.
- Pressure Israel to allow the free and unrestricted passage of all consignments of humanitarian aid essential for the survival of the civilian population to stop its policy of starvation.
- Address the root causes of Israel’s settler colonialism, illegal occupation and apartheid.

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