

ISRAEL BREACHES IHL BY FORCING 250,000 PALESTINIANS IN GAZA INTO “DEATH TRAP” WITHOUT FOOD, WATER, SHELTER: OXFAM

EMERGENCIES

Press Releases

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Israel’s latest evacuation order, calling for a quarter of a million people to leave Eastern Khan Younis, violates the Geneva Convention and is in breach of multiple provisions of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), because it has failed to provide safe passage, or a safe final destination where basic humanitarian needs can be met, Oxfam said today.

Oxfam says the so-called ‘humanitarian zone’, where people have been ordered to go, is one of the most densely populated displacement areas in the world, with a dire lack of sufficient food, water, medical services, or shelter. Ongoing military assaults have created an incredibly unsafe environment for aid organisations, meaning barely any assistance is reaching those in need. There have also been regular attacks resulting in civilian deaths despite the promise that the area was ‘safe’.

Oxfam staff sheltering in the so-called ‘safe zone’ said there had been an increase in shelling in recent days and that people were living in medieval conditions, camping in the streets, with

no hygiene products and rapidly-spreading disease.

Sally Abi Khalil, Oxfam's Middle East Director, said: "Pushing hundreds of thousands more people into what is essentially a death trap, devoid of any facilities, is barbaric and a breach of International Humanitarian Law.

"Yet again, we are seeing vast numbers of people being forced to flee under Israeli military orders, with no heed for their safety or dignity.

"The areas Israel has defined as 'humanitarian' and 'safe' are, in reality, the polar opposite, leaving families with the horrific choice between staying in an active combat zone or moving somewhere that is already desperately overcrowded, dangerous and unfit for human existence."

The latest evacuation order is one of the largest forced mass displacements of people since the escalation of hostilities in Gaza began. Orders have been given with very little notice or information for those being told to flee. Just last week, Israeli forces ordered the evacuation of the Shuja'iya neighbourhood in Gaza City, forcibly displacing at least 60,000 people. Oxfam was told that people had to run with whatever they could carry, including women having to grab bread from their makeshift clay ovens, as Israeli tanks rolled in.

Despite the frequency of evacuation orders, and the huge numbers of people being told to move, Oxfam said none of the declared safe routes in Gaza are actually safe. Israel's military has also systematically attacked civilians and aid workers, including in those clearly marked 'safe zones' and 'evacuation routes'. Israel has repeatedly failed to comply with international law, which compels it to take all possible measures to ensure satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition, and that family members are not separated.

Oxfam is calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, so that life-saving aid can get to all of those in need, and to ensure the safe release of all hostages and unlawfully detained Palestinians.

Sally Abi Khalil said: "The human cost of the military offensive in Gaza is unacceptable and we call on all parties to push for an immediate and lasting ceasefire, in order to end the bloodshed and suffering."

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For more info, or to arrange an interview please contact: Sarah Dransfield in the Oxfam Press Office, on 07884 114825 / sdransfield@oxfam.org.uk

Notes to editors:

Oxfam currently has 29 staff in Gaza, who are working closely with local partners and have supported 451,342 people with lifesaving WASH, Food and Economic Security, provision of

Non-Food Items and Protection activities since the 7th of October. To date, they have also rehabilitated 29 wastewater networks in Rafah and Khan Yunis, reaching 226,000 people. Five desalination units across Rafah were installed to provide safe drinking water. Oxfam and partners built some of the first desalination plants in its response, providing fresh water reaching 10,500 people. Because of ongoing shelling, Oxfam and partners have been unable to relocate the units to a safer place in order for them to be used, depriving 13,000 people of clean water.

Along with 14 partner organisations in Gaza, Oxfam started responding in the days after the crisis, delivering cash, food, and essential basic items as well as restoring water and sanitation services where possible. Oxfam and partner staff are working under extremely challenging circumstances.

On IHL:

- Customary International Humanitarian Law Rule 131: In case of displacement, all possible measures must be taken in order that the civilians concerned are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition and that members of the same family are not separated.
- ([https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule131#:~:text=State%20practice%20establishes%20this%20rule,provided%20for%20in%](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule131#:~:text=State%20practice%20establishes%20this%20rule,provided%20for%20in%20the%20territory%20of%20the%20Occupying%20Power,provided%20that%20the%20members%20of%20the%20same%20family%20are%20not%20separated.&context=ihl&document=131))
- Fourth Geneva Convention, 1949, Article 49 - Deportations, transfers, evacuations. Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive.

Nevertheless, the Occupying Power may undertake total or partial evacuation of a given area if the security of the population or imperative military reasons so demand. Such evacuations may not involve the displacement of protected persons outside the bounds of the occupied territory except when for material reasons it is impossible to avoid such displacement. Persons thus evacuated shall be transferred back to their homes as soon as hostilities in the area in question have ceased.

The Occupying Power undertaking such transfers or evacuations shall ensure, to the greatest practicable extent, that proper accommodation is provided to receive the protected persons, that the removals are effected in satisfactory conditions of hygiene, health, safety and nutrition, and that members of the same family are not separated.

The Protecting Power shall be informed of any transfers and evacuations as soon as they have taken place.

The Occupying Power shall not detain protected persons in an area particularly exposed to the dangers of war unless the security of the population or imperative military reasons so demand.

The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.

(<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-49/commentary/1958>)

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