

Military operations in Rafah could lead to a slaughter in Gaza and put a fragile humanitarian operation at death's door

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

(Geneva, 13 February 2024) The scenario we have long dreaded is unraveling at alarming speed.

More than half of Gaza's population – well over 1 million people – are crammed in Rafah, staring death in the face: They have little to eat, hardly any access to medical care, nowhere to sleep, nowhere safe to go.

They, like the entire population of Gaza, are the victims of an assault that is unparalleled in its intensity, brutality and scope.

More than 28,000 people – mostly women and children – have been killed across Gaza, according to the Ministry of Health.

For more than four months, humanitarian workers have been doing the near-impossible to assist people in need, despite the risks they themselves were facing and the traumas they were enduring.

But no amount of dedication and goodwill is enough to keep millions of people alive, fed and protected – while the bombs are falling and the aid is choked off.

Add to this the widespread despair, the breakdown of law and order, and the defunding of UNRWA.

The consequences are humanitarian workers who are shot at, held at gunpoint, attacked and killed.

I have said for weeks now that our humanitarian response is in tatters.

Today, I'm sounding the alarm once again: Military operations in Rafah could lead to a slaughter in Gaza. They could also leave an already fragile humanitarian operation at death's door.

We lack the safety guarantees, the aid supplies and the staff capacity to keep this operation afloat.

The international community has been warning against the dangerous consequences of any ground invasion in Rafah. The Government of Israel cannot continue to ignore these calls.

History will not be kind.

This war must end.