

Open Letter: States Must Urgently Intervene to Stop a ‘Srebrenica’ Massacre in Rafah and Enforce a Ceasefire

Friday 17 May 2024, by [Al Mezan](#), [Al-Haq](#), [JABARIN Shawan](#), [Palestinian Centre for Human Rights](#), [SOURANI Raji](#), [YOUNIS Issam](#) (Date first published: 6 May 2024).

We, the General Directors of the Palestinian human rights organisations, Al-Haq, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, write to you to urge your immediate and direct intervention to stop Israel’s attack on Rafah in Gaza, amid Israel’s genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, ongoing for 213 consecutive days.



Your Excellency,

This morning, 6 May 2024, the Israeli warplanes dropped leaflets ordering hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in eastern Rafah -- the vast majority of whom are internally displaced persons, many already forced to relocate several times -- to evacuate the area. Less than 15 hours later, without time for families to evacuate the area, Israel began its aerial bombardment of Rafah. Our organisations had [already alerted](#) the international community multiple times of the devastating consequences of a ground invasion. Alarmingly, this latest evacuation order includes areas of Karem Abu Salem and Rafah crossings, the latter being the lifeline for more than two million Palestinians, as well as Abu Yousef Al-Najjar Hospital, the main medical facility in the entire Rafah Governorate.

The population of the Rafah Governorate has increased almost sixfold from 275,000 residents to over 1.5 million in the past seven months. Now housing roughly three quarters of Gaza’s population, parts of Rafah (Al-Shaboura, Tal Al-Sultan, and the Al-Zohour neighbourhoods) are considered the last alleged “safe zones” in Gaza. However, Israel has repeatedly [bombed](#) Rafah since issuing previous evacuation orders demanding Palestinians to flee there. More recently, and according to the information available to our field researchers, Israeli warplanes directly targeted ten homes as well as agricultural lands across different areas of Rafah from the evening of 5 May until the early hours of 6 May 2024. These attacks resulted in the killing of 28 Palestinians, including 11 children and eight women, while others have sustained injuries or remain missing under the rubble.

Reports are emerging that the Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF) have purchased thousands of [tents](#) to accommodate persons that will be displaced as a result of the ground invasion of Rafah.

Last week, Israel’s Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, renewed his vow to invade Rafah “with or without” a ceasefire deal. As this vow becomes more imminent, we underscore that no options remain for Palestinians in Rafah. Al-Mawasi area in Khan Younis -- another alleged “safe zone” is

where Palestinians are instructed to flee. However, this purported 'safe zone' has also been repeatedly subjected to airstrikes, [including in the last week](#). Moreover, Al-Mawasi area already suffers from extreme overcrowding and lack of sufficient WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Health) facilities which are crucial in preventing infections and the rapid spread of disease. **People have nowhere to go, as nowhere is safe in the entirety of the Gaza Strip.**

To be clear, an invasion of Rafah would be unlike anything we have witnessed. Our organisations are deeply concerned that Israel, in plans reminiscent of Srebrenica, will continue with its practice to separate out men from women and children while walking through the so-called 'safe routes', and by reports of Israel's intentions to [prevent](#) Palestinian men from leaving Rafah.

Israeli ground invasion into Rafah would precipitate the utter collapse of the already precarious humanitarian aid infrastructure. This vital lifeline, systematically obstructed by Israel, operates primarily through the border crossings situated in the south eastern areas of Rafah: Rafah with Egypt and Karem Abu Salem under Israeli control. Moreover, the indispensable and life-saving efforts of humanitarian agencies, already under relentless Israeli assault, will face even graver challenges.

This perilous situation heightens the risk of a man-made famine in southern Gaza, echoing the "full-blown famine" that ravaged northern Gaza, as per the assessment of the World Food Programme.

Our organisations emphasise the urgent need for an immediate international intervention to immediately stop the land invasion on Rafah, secure the return of displaced Palestinians to their homes and ensure the unhindered provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance, including food, water, electricity, fuel, shelter, clothing, hygiene and sanitation requirements, as well as medical supplies and medical care to Palestinians throughout Gaza.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has twice stated the need to prevent genocide, an *erga omnes* obligation of all signatory States to the Genocide Convention which is persistently violated by States that continue to arm and financially support Israel's settler-colonial, apartheid, and genocidal regime. Our organisations urgently request that States immediately halt all military support for Israel and make clear that attacks on Rafah must be met with a unified, tangible response. This should include [a two-way arms embargo](#), economic sanctions, including freezing the assets of all Israeli government and army officials, as well as travel bans and divestment from all Israeli activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).

In order to convey to Israeli leaders that the long-standing impunity they have enjoyed has now ceased, States must publicly support South Africa's proceedings before the ICJ. Moreover, as we continue our work to ensure the issuance of the long-awaited arrest warrants of Israeli officials and perpetrators by the International Criminal Court (ICC), we call on States Parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC to urgently refer the Situation to the Court and support the Office of the Prosecutor in its investigation. This includes the sharing of information, where relevant, cooperating on arrest warrants, and making financial contributions to the Court and the Trust Fund for Victims to ensure the viability of the Situation in Palestine.

Lastly, the international community as a whole must actively and meaningfully work towards ending Israel's illegal occupation and dismantling the settler-colonial apartheid regime against the Palestinian people. The process of emptying Gaza and destroying Palestinian life and culture therein is a manifestation of the ongoing *Nakba*. Just as the international community stood by then, it stands by now. Echoes of condemnation from world leaders have the same effect as silence. What is needed is action.

The ongoing genocide in Gaza is a stark reminder to the harsh reality of unchecked impunity and the bleak world it creates. We implore your State to immediately intervene by every means available to prevent further atrocities and unjust and unwarranted suffering in Rafah and to ensure that immediate measures are taken to enforce a ceasefire. We urge States to act decisively, in accordance with their *erga omnes* obligations to stop the genocide. After seven months of live-streamed genocide, Palestinians in Gaza have had enough and their suffering must end.

06□ May 2024

Yours Sincerely,

Shawan Jabarin,

Issam Younis

Raji Sourani

P.S.

• Al-Haq. 06□ May 2024:

<https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/22964.html?sourceid=1001761&emci=72c6b1d4-ae0c-ef11-96f3-7c1e521b07f9&emdi=2e3b3fed-510d-ef11-96f3-7c1e521b07f9&ceid=3944>