

*ActionAid warns intensification
of Israel attacks on Rafah would
have disastrous consequences*

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Ramallah, February 12 (RHC)-- An international humanitarian organization has issued a strong warning against intensification of Israel's attacks on the city of Rafah in the southern part of the Gaza Strip, which hosts over half of the territory's population amid the regime's genocidal war.

"We are deeply concerned by reports of a potential ground invasion in Rafah and increased airstrikes on the area," Riham Jafari, ActionAid Palestine's advocacy and communications coordinator, said on Sunday.

More than one million people, above five times Rafah's usual population, have fled to the southern Gaza city amid Israel's brutal military aggression, which has killed upwards of 28,000 Palestinians, mostly

women and children, since it was started on October 7, 2023.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the Israeli military on Friday to prepare to evacuate civilians from Rafah ahead of a planned ground operation against the city. Aid organizations, however, say such a move will be nearly impossible, given the scale of devastation elsewhere in Gaza and the huge number of people trapped in the besieged area.

"Let us be absolutely clear: any intensification of hostilities in Rafah, where more than 1.4 million people are sheltering, would be absolutely disastrous," Jafari added. Noting that thousands of civilians "have already been killed in this months-long nightmare in Gaza," she said, "It is impossible to see how this number wouldn't soar even higher if the final remaining supposedly safe place in the Strip came under attack. Where on earth is Gaza's exhausted and starving population supposed to go?"

"Airstrikes have already reportedly increased in Rafah," ActionAid said in a separate statement, adding that "any attacks would undoubtedly cause a high number of casualties." "There is nowhere left for people in Gaza to flee to," the organization said, noting that more than 85 percent of the territory's 2.3 million inhabitants have already been forced to leave their homes over the last four months, with many displaced multiple times.

"The huge influx of people arriving in Rafah has already put enormous strain on infrastructure and resources, yet people are continuing to arrive in their thousands," the statement read.

"Overcrowding is extreme, with any available space taken up by tents, some of which are home to up to 12 people. Thousands of people are living crammed into increasingly unsanitary shelters, where hundreds of people share a single toilet," ActionAid said.

Despite the threat of the looming Israeli invasion, the Palestinians in the city have vowed to remain there, asserting through a statement, "We will die standing tall. Either victory...or martyrdom."

Also on Sunday and through a post on X social media platform, the Netherlands' Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot said, "Hard to see how large-scale military operations in such a densely populated area would not lead to many civilian casualties and a bigger humanitarian catastrophe."

"This is unjustifiable," she stressed, adding, "It is of the utmost importance that negotiations quickly lead to a temporary humanitarian ceasefire and eventually to a sustained cessation of hostilities."

In a related development, Britain's top diplomat David Cameron said he was "deeply concerned" about the prospect of an Israeli military offensive in Rafah. "The priority must be an immediate pause in the fighting to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire," he wrote on X.

Joining the chorus, France's Foreign Ministry said: "A large-scale Israeli offensive in Rafah would create a catastrophic humanitarian situation of a new and unjustifiable dimension." "To avoid disaster, we reiterate our call for an end to the fighting," it added in a statement.

The ministry also reiterated that Israel must take concrete measures to protect the lives of the civilian population in Gaza. "In Gaza, like everywhere else, France opposes any forced displacement of populations, which is prohibited by international humanitarian law," it said.

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