



12 December 2023

Following the forced evacuation of hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians by Israeli occupying forces to Rafah City in the southern Gaza Strip, as supposedly “a safe area”, military attacks persisted in the city. The most recent of which occurred at dawn on Tuesday, 12 December 2023, and killed 22 Palestinians, including five children and three women.

The Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), Al Mezan, and Al-Haq, strongly condemn this latest attack, which clearly illustrates that Israeli forces are intentionally committing crimes against Palestinians, underscoring our previous assertion that there is no safe place in Gaza.

According to our teams’ investigations, at approximately 3:02 a.m. on 12 December 2023, Israeli warplanes targeted the house of Omar Mohammad Harb in the Al-Zohour neighborhood in Rafah, with occupants and a large number of displaced individuals inside, without prior warning. This attack killed 22 Palestinians, including five children and three women, injured others, and completely destroyed the house. Also, some individuals remain trapped under the rubble. Among the house’s residents were relatives and other displaced people from the Abu Al-Shaar, Awad, and Al-Samman families from outside Rafah. Additionally, a young girl from Abu Jame’ family from Khan Younis, was killed in the attack. She was with her family in a tent near a shelter centre in the area.

The Al-Zohour neighborhood in Rafah is one of the areas designated as safe by the Israeli forces. Following the Israeli “evacuation orders” issued in the past days ordering the residents of many neighborhoods in Khan Younis to leave, hundreds of thousands of displaced people sought refuge in this area.

Rafah City spans an area of 64 km², with an estimated population of around 260,000 people according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in 2021. However, since the issuance of Israel's evacuation orders for the residents of Gaza and its north on October 13, the city's population has multiplied. The pace of displacement to the city further accelerated with the initiation of the Israeli ground invasion in Khan Younis and its declaration as a combat zone.

Our organizations stress that the substantial overcrowding of both the local population and displaced individuals in the city makes any Israeli attack highly likely to result in a significant number of casualties.

The immense overcrowding resulting from cramming hundreds of thousands of people into a limited geographical area has led to a catastrophic situation. All shelter centers have exceeded their capacity, and new centers were opened in mosques and public places in Rafah to house the huge numbers of displaced people. Tens of thousands of displaced people are staying in the open air near tents set up on lands and any available open spaces, lacking essential services related to water, sanitation, and food. Markets are empty, and both residents and displaced people are grappling with hunger. The situation is even more dire in north Gaza and in Khan Younis, and Gaza has become a disaster zone by all standards.

Due to the deterioration of health conditions in UNRWA-managed shelters, which are overwhelmed with displaced people, various diseases have spread among people there, including diarrhea, acute respiratory infections, skin infections, and lice infestations. This situation is attributed to the poor sanitation and hygiene in these overcrowded shelters.

According to the latest update from the Palestinian Ministry of Health as of 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, 12 December 2023, Israeli attacks on Gaza have killed 18,412 Palestinians and injured 50,100 others since October 7, with 70% of the victims being children and women. It is worth noting that the vast majority of the victims, including men, are civilians, including thousands of elderly people and 300 medical personnel.

Our organizations reiterate their call on the peoples of the world, civil society organizations, and influential forces to mobilize and exert all forms of political and legal pressure on their governments, particularly in Europe and the United States of America. These governments have to change their positions, cease their support for the genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people, and comply with international humanitarian law.

We also call on the international community to take serious and immediate action to stop Israel's military aggression on Gaza and to halt its policy of targeting civilians and civilian objects, as a means of retaliation, punishment, and political pressure. Additionally, we emphasize the need to take effective measures to ensure accountability for Israel's war crimes and genocide in Gaza, along with the gross violations perpetrated against the entire Palestinian people in occupied Palestinian territory.

We further call on the international community to ensure the end of the Israeli occupation, and the dismantling of Israel's settler-colonial and apartheid regime. We call for the repeal of all discriminatory and inhumane laws, policies, and practices against the entire Palestinian people, and to enable them to exercise their unconditional right to self-determination without restriction.