

Briefing Note - Gaza

Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Ravina Shamdasani

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The increasing issuance by Israeli Forces of “evacuation orders” – which are, in effect, displacement orders – have resulted in the forcible transfer of Palestinian in Gaza into ever shrinking spaces where they have little or no access to life-saving services, including water, food and shelter, and where they continue to be subject to attacks.

Since 18 March, Israel has issued 21 “evacuation orders”. On 31 March, the Israeli military issued an order covering almost all of Rafah, the southern-most governorate, followed by a large-scale ground operation in the area. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were already reportedly trapped in Rafah, including in Tal Al Sultan area, with no way out and no access to humanitarian aid.

While Israel, as an occupying power, can lawfully order the temporary evacuations of civilians in certain areas under strict conditions, the nature and scope of the evacuation orders raise serious concerns that Israel intends permanently to remove the civilian population from these areas in order to create a “buffer zone”. Permanently displacing the civilian population within occupied territory amounts to forcible transfer, a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute.

Meanwhile, Israeli military strikes continue across Gaza, leaving nowhere safe. Between 18 March and 9 April 2025, there were some 224 incidents of Israeli strikes on residential buildings and tents for internally displaced people (IDPs). In some 36 strikes about which the UN Human Rights Office corroborated information, the fatalities recorded so far were only women and children. Overall, a large percentage of fatalities are children and women, according to information recorded by our Office. A recent strike on the residential building of the Abu Issa family in Deir al Balah on 6 April reportedly killed one girl, four women, and one four-year-old boy. And despite Israeli military orders instructing civilians to relocate to the Al Mawasi area of Khan Younis, strikes continued on IDP tents in that area - with at least 23 such incidents recorded by the Office since 18 March.

Compounding this alarming trend is the targeting and killing of the Palestinian journalists. During the night of 6-7 April, an Israeli airstrike hit a tent in front of Nasr Medical Complex in Khan Younis where a number of journalists were known to have been staying. The attack reportedly came without warning, killing one journalist and one press agency assistant, and wounding nine other journalists, including one who later died from his injuries. The Israeli military subsequently claimed that one of those injured was a Hamas member, but it remains unclear whether this individual had been identified and targeted as a member of the armed wing

of Hamas, or otherwise. Since October 2023, over 209 journalists have been killed in Gaza, while Israel continues to deny access to international media.

These and other attacks raise serious questions about Israeli Forces' compliance with international humanitarian law, particularly with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in attack. Intentionally directing attacks against civilians not taking a direct part in hostilities constitutes a war crime.

Further compounding the desperate conditions for Palestinian civilians, Israel's closure of crossings into the Gaza Strip has entered its sixth week, preventing the entry of food, safe drinking water, medicines and other essential aid or supplies. Israeli officials have made statements suggesting that the entry of humanitarian aid is directly linked to the release of hostages, raising serious concerns about collective punishment and the use of starvation of the civilian population as a method of war, both of which constitute crimes under international law.

In light of the cumulative impact of Israeli Forces' conduct in Gaza, the Office is seriously concerned that Israel appears to be inflicting on Palestinians in Gaza conditions of life increasingly incompatible with their continued existence as a group in Gaza.

Protests by Palestinians against Hamas, in exercise of their rights to peaceful assembly and expression under international law, have also been repressed by force, with harsh retribution exacted against a number of individuals.

The despair of Palestinians, under assault from outside as well as such pressure within, knows no bounds.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk has stressed, including before the UN Security Council last week, that the last 18 months of violence have made this abundantly clear: there is no military path out of this crisis. All parties must be entirely focused on achieving a ceasefire, rather than seeking to justify the prolongation of senseless violence. The only way forward is a political settlement, based on two states living side by side in equal dignity and rights, in line with UN resolutions and international law. All hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. All those arbitrarily detained must also be released.

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