

Humanitarian aid stuck at Gaza border as WHO warns of catastrophe



Gaza City, October 18 (RHC)-- Egyptian authorities have said that Israel is not cooperating with efforts to deliver much-needed humanitarian aid into the besieged Gaza Strip, where Israeli air strikes have killed thousands of people and displaced hundreds of thousands of others.

Cairo said earlier this week that the Rafah crossing, the sole remaining exit out of Gaza, has been rendered nearly inoperable by continuous Israeli air strikes, with hundreds of tonnes of aid stalled on the Egyptian side.

“There is an urgent need to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian civilians in Gaza,” Egypt’s Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry told reporters, adding that talks with Israel have not been productive. “Until now the Israeli government has not taken a position on opening the Rafah crossing from the Gaza side to allow the entrance of assistance and exit of citizens of third countries.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said in a statement that “there is currently no ceasefire and humanitarian aid in Gaza in return for removing foreigners.”

The dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza has reached new heights, with Israel cutting off access to food, water, fuel and electricity for the besieged enclave’s 2.3 million residents and unleashing a barrage of air strikes that Palestinian authorities say have killed more than 2,800 people and injured more than 10,000.

The United Nations humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths has said that he will travel to the Middle East on Tuesday for negotiations over aid to Gaza, adding that he hoped for “good news” later on Monday.

Griffiths also urged the Palestinian armed group Hamas, which governs the coastal enclave, to release the more than 100 people it took captive during a deadly attack on southern Israel on October 7 “straight away.” That attack killed at least 1,400 people, Israeli authorities say, many of them civilians.

The World Health Organization (WHO) warned on Monday afternoon that there were only “24 hours of water, electricity and fuel left” in the Gaza Strip before “a real catastrophe” sets in. Israel has thus far shown little interest in letting in aid.

“I strongly oppose the opening of the blockade and the introduction of goods into Gaza on humanitarian grounds,” Israeli Energy Minister Israel Katz said in a social media post earlier on Monday. “Our commitment is to the families of the murdered and the kidnapped hostages – not to the Hamas murderers and those who helped them,” Katz added.

Israel has declared war against Hamas and is expected to launch a ground invasion of Gaza, with the aim of destroying the Palestinian group. But in Gaza, there is nowhere for Palestinians to flee the onslaught, and Israel has ordered the entire population of northern Gaza — more than one million people — to evacuate south, an order that the UN has said could create a humanitarian catastrophe.

Many Palestinians also fear that the evacuation could turn into permanent exile, as happened during the 1948 Nakba when Israeli forces expelled hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes and barred them from returning.

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