

Death toll nears 28,000 as Rafah assault looms

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Rafah, February 10 (RHC)-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Nethayahu has reportedly ordered the military to develop a plan to both evacuate civilians from Rafah and bomb the southern city, as Palestine's UN envoy questions where civilians will be evacuated amid the planned attack.

UN chief Antonio Guterres says half of Gaza's 2.3 million population "is now crammed into Rafah with nowhere to go" -- warning the displaced "have no homes" and "no hope."

Observers warn of an imminent bloodbath when Israel invades Rafah.

Israel has increased its air strikes on the southern city of Rafah ahead of an expected ground offensive and amid fears for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians now trapped after fleeing to the city in search of refuge.

More than 600,000 children and their families have been displaced in Rafah, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reports, and UNICEF warns that "thousands could die in the violence or by lack of services and further disruption of humanitarian assistance".

Between Thursday and Friday afternoon, a further 107 Palestinians were reported killed and 142 injured in attacks by Israeli forces, UNOCHA said.

The bombing of a residential building near al-Kuwaiti Hospital in Rafah that killed eight people, including three children and a woman, and left 18 injured. And at least 15 people were killed when Israel's military hit residential buildings in Deir el-Balah and Az Zawayda in central Gaza.

Israeli snipers were reported to have killed seven displaced people as they crossed a road near a school in the west of Khan Younis city.

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