

Israel bombs Rafah after Netanyahu orders preparation for ground invasion



A child finds his way through the rubble of a building hit by Israeli bombardment in Rafah [Mahmud Hams/AFP]

Rafah, February 10 (RHC)-- Israel has launched heavy bombing of Rafah after prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered troops to prepare for the invasion of the densely crowded town in the southern Gaza Strip.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said new strikes hit the city early Saturday after the Israeli military intensified air raids ahead of an imminent ground invasion. "We don't know where to go," said Mohammad al-Jarrah, a Palestinian who was displaced from further north to Rafah.

Media reports said at least 11 residents were killed and many others injured late Friday after the Israeli military targeted a house in the al-Nasr neighborhood north of Rafah. Three people were also killed in an bombing that targeted a house in the al-Geneina neighborhood, east of the city.

Netanyahu's planned invasion of Rafah, where an estimated 1.3 million people have fled, has drawn condemnation from rights groups and world countries.

The city is the last major population center in the Gaza Strip that Israeli troops have yet to invade and also the main point of entry for desperately needed relief supplies.

Elsewhere in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli artillery targeted the Taiba school sheltering displaced people east of Khan Yunis, with the regime's boats firing shells at the Deir al-Balah beach in the middle of the besieged enclave.

Israeli forces also raided al-Amal Hospital in Khan Yunis after a weeks-long siege during which the Palestinian Red Crescent has reported "intense artillery shelling and heavy gunfire."

The medical organization said Israeli forces had arrested eight of its members at the hospital, including "four doctors, as well as four wounded individuals and five patients' companions." Ahmed Moghrabi, a surgeon at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, described as "very dangerous" the situation at the medical complex, with staff unable to move between buildings due to Israeli shelling. "We can't move from one building to another building," Moghrabi, a plastic surgeon, said in a video posted to Instagram. "It's very dangerous."

Palestine's Safa News Agency said four people had been killed in a bombing inside the courtyards of the Nasser complex. The news agency also reported an aerial bombardment of agricultural land near the coastal entrance to the town of al-Zawaida in the central Gaza Strip.

On Friday, Netanyahu ordered the military to "prepare to operate" in Rafah despite warnings that such a move "would be a disaster." His office said he had ordered the military to come up with a "combined plan" that includes both a mass evacuation of civilians in Rafah and attacks on Hamas fighters.

At the start of the aggression on Gaza in early October last year, the regime ordered 1.1 million people in the north of Gaza to evacuate and move south of the enclave which has been the target of intense bombing.

Rights groups sounded alarm at the prospect of a ground invasion, with Doctors Without Borders saying in a statement, "Israel's declared ground offensive on Rafah would be catastrophic and must not proceed. There is no place that is safe in Gaza and no way for people to leave."

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