

Israel plans forced exodus of Palestinians ahead of Rafah incursion

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Rafah, March 15 (RHC)-- Israel seeks to forcibly displace a significant part of 1.4 million Palestinians currently sheltering in Rafah toward the so-called "humanitarian islands" in the center of the territory ahead of an incursion into Gaza's southernmost city.

Israel's chief military spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari made the announcement while speaking to reporters on Wednesday as Israel plans to launch a ground invasion of Rafah. He added that the transfer of Palestinians in Rafah to the designated areas was a key part of the military's preparations for its invasion of Rafah.

"We need to make sure that 1.4 million people or at least a significant amount of the 1.4 million will move. Where? To humanitarian islands that we will create with the international community," Hagari said at the briefing. He did not give further details about the time of Rafah exodus or the city's invasion but noted that Tel Aviv seeks the timing to be right operationally and to be coordinated with neighboring Egypt.

Egypt has previously said that it does not want an influx of displaced Palestinians crossing its border. It is constructing a walled enclosure along its border with Gaza, sparking concerns over potential Palestinian displacement as Israel considers expanding its offensive into Rafah.

The Israeli military spokesman also claimed that Israel plans to "flood the area" with aid, including housing, food, and water. This comes as humanitarian groups have expressed concern over the fate of Palestinians displaced as a result of Israel's war as well those living in Rafah, saying an offensive in the crowded region would be catastrophic.

Even the U.S., a staunch supporter of Israel, has cast doubt on Israel's claim that it will provide protection and aid for civilians in its plan to drive them out of Rafah. "We need to see a plan that will get civilians out of harm's way if there's a military operation in Rafah. We've not yet seen such a plan," Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters in Washington on Wednesday after convening a virtual ministerial meeting on Gaza aid with officials from the UN, the EU, Britain, Qatar, the UAE, and Cyprus.

Israel's relentless bombing of Gaza has forced the local residents to flee toward the southern city of Rafah. According to Gaza's health ministry, at least 31,272 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed and over 73,024 others injured since the Israeli regime launched its US-backed onslaught on Gaza on October 7, 2023.

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