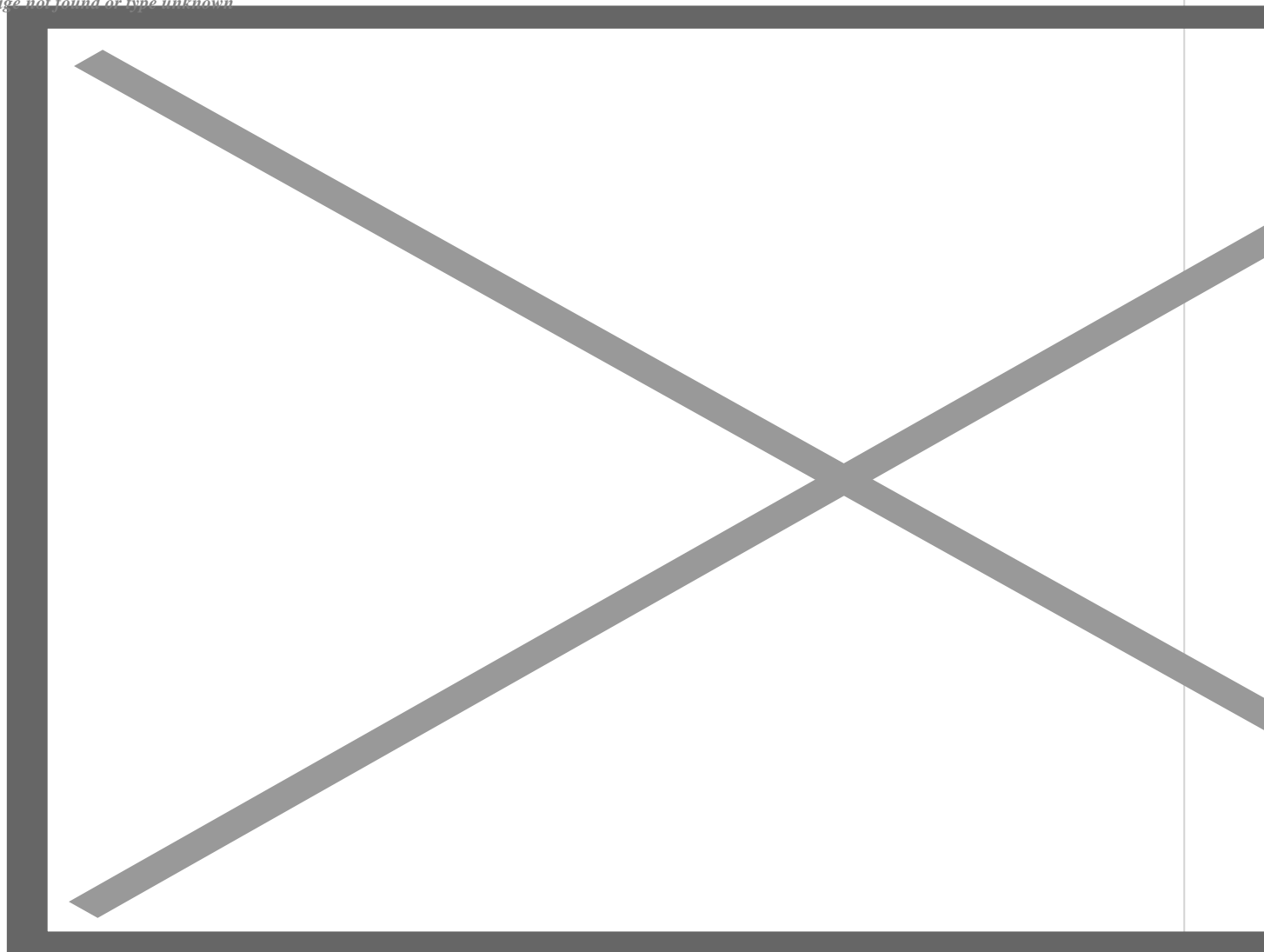


UNICEF warns Rafah invasion would put 600,000 children at risk of catastrophe

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Displaced Palestinian children look out from a makeshift shelter in the courtyard of a school in

Rafah, the southern Gaza Strip (AFP)

Geneva, May 7 (RHC)-- UNICEF says an Israeli ground invasion of Gaza's southern city of Rafah would pose "catastrophic risks" to the hundreds of thousands of children taking shelter there.

In a statement released on Monday, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell issued a stark warning indicating that around 600,000 children in Rafah are facing an imminent "catastrophe."

"Rafah is now a city of children, who have nowhere safe to go in Gaza. If large scale military operations start, not only will children be at risk from the violence, but also from chaos and panic, and at a time where their physical and mental states are already weakened," she said.

UNICEF said children in Gaza are being "disproportionately" killed and wounded, while suffering "more acutely from disruptions to healthcare and education." "More than 200 days of war have taken an unimaginable toll on the lives of children," Catherine said.

UNICEF emphasized the dire circumstances the children of Rafah face, highlighting the potential for a significant increase in civilian casualties and the destruction of essential services and infrastructure.

According to UNICEF, Gaza's youth are already teetering on the brink of survival, with many in Rafah having endured displacement multiple times and having nowhere else to seek refuge. The agency underscored the urgent need to protect the lives and well-being of these children.

Israel has already killed more than 34,700 people, mostly children and women, in Gaza since early October, according to the ministry of health in the besieged Palestinian territory.

The resistance movement Hamas has warned Israel that any ground operation in Rafah would have serious consequences for the regime. The Palestinian resistance group said in a statement on Monday that "any military operation in Rafah will not be a walk in the park for the fascist occupation army."

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