

*Egypt announces it will join  
South Africa's genocide case  
against Israel at International  
Court of Justice*

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Cairo, May 13 (RHC)-- Egypt says it will formally join the case filed by South Africa against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which accuses Israel of violating its obligations under the Genocide Convention in its war on the Gaza Strip.

The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Sunday that Cairo intended to join the case due to escalating Israeli aggression against Palestinian civilians. "The submission ... comes in light of the worsening severity and scope of Israeli attacks against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, and the continued perpetration of systematic practices against the Palestinian people, including direct targeting of civilians and the destruction of infrastructure in the Strip, and pushing Palestinians to flee," the ministry said in a statement.

South Africa brought its case against Israel in January, accusing the country of committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. The death toll from Israel's war on Gaza, which began in October, has surpassed 35,000, and most of the dead are women and children, according to Palestinian authorities.

Israel launched the assault after Hamas led an attack on southern Israel, killing at least 1,139 people, mostly civilians, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on Israeli statistics.

The top United Nations court issued an interim ruling in January that found there was a plausible risk of genocide in the enclave and ordered Israel to take a series of provisional measures, including preventing any genocidal acts from taking place.

The court, which sits in The Hague, rejected a second South African application for emergency measures made in March over Israel's threat to attack Rafah. Egypt will join Turkey and Colombia in formally requesting to join the case against Israel. This month, Turkey said it would seek to join the case after the South American country asked the ICJ last month to allow it to join to ensure "the safety and, indeed, the very existence of the Palestinian people".

Egypt said it is calling on Israel "to comply with its obligations as the occupying power and to implement the provisional measures issued by the ICJ, which require ensuring access to humanitarian and relief aid in a manner that meets the needs of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip." It also demands that Israeli forces do not commit any violations against the Palestinian people.

It will likely take years before the court will rule on the merits of the genocide case. While the ICJ's rulings are binding and without appeal, the court has no way to enforce them. Israel has repeatedly said it is acting in accordance with international law in Gaza. It has called South Africa's genocide case baseless and accused Pretoria of acting as "the legal arm of Hamas."

Alon Liel, former director of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told Al Jazeera that Egypt's move was an "unbelievable diplomatic blow to Israel." "Egypt is the cornerstone of our standing in the Middle East," he said. The connections that Israel has in the Middle East and North Africa today, including with Jordan, the UAE and Morocco, are all "a result of what Egypt did 40 years ago," he said, referring to the 1979 peace treaty between the two countries.

"With Egypt joining South Africa now in The Hague, it's a real diplomatic punch. Israel would have to take it very seriously. "Israel has to ... listen to the world – not only to the Israeli public opinion asking now for revenge. "We have to look overall in the wider picture, in the long-term security of Israel, not only in the next few weeks in Gaza."

The latest legal development comes as Israel engaged in new battles with Hamas in northern Gaza and ordered tens of thousands more people to evacuate from the southern city of Rafah, which lies close to Gaza's border with Egypt.

Israeli forces seized the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing on Tuesday, a day after Hamas said it had accepted an Egyptian-Qatari mediated ceasefire proposal, which Israel quickly rejected. The crossing had been the main entry point for aid into Gaza, but it has been closed since Israel took control of it.

Tanks and planes pounded several areas and at least four houses in Rafah overnight, killing 20 Palestinians and wounding several others, according to Palestinian health officials.

The city is crammed with more than one million displaced Palestinians living in dire conditions, and the international community has warned Israel that a full-scale Israeli ground assault would trigger a humanitarian catastrophe for civilians. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the Rafah offensive was needed to defeat Hamas.

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