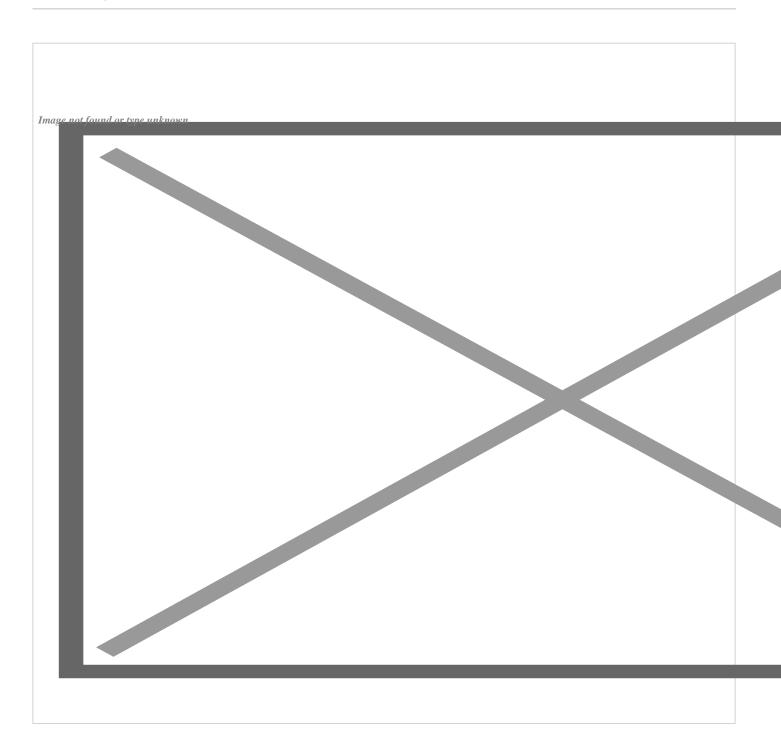# UN says 800,000 people have fled Rafah as Israel kills dozens in Gaza

Geneva, May 19 (RHC)-- Nearly 800,000 Palestinians have been displaced from Rafah since Israel launched its offensive against the southern Gaza city last week, Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, has said. Lazzarini decried the repeated displacement of Palestinians in the statement on Saturday.

"Since the war in Gaza began, Palestinians have been forced to flee multiple times in search of safety that they have never found, including in UNRWA shelters," Lazzarini said.   "When people move, they are exposed, without safe passage or protection. Every time, they are forced to leave behind the few belongings they have:? mattresses, tents, cooking utensils and basic supplies that they cannot carry or pay to transport. "Every time, they have to start from scratch, all over again.?"

Saturday saw intense fighting across Gaza – not just in Rafah – with Israeli attacks killing dozens of Palestinians.
The Ministry of Health in Gaza said early in the day that 83 Palestinians had ben killed over the previous 24 hours.

Later on Saturday, Al Jazeera Arabic correspondent Ismail Alghoul reported that 40 bodies had reached the Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza after Israel bombed the Jabalia refugee camp. At least 15 people were killed in one attack.

The Wafa news agency also said four Palestinians were killed during Israel's bombing of Khan Younis, north of Rafah, and three others were killed in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza. The violence throughout the territory underscores humanitarian advocates' warnings that there is nowhere safe for people in Rafah to flee to.

Israel has faced international warnings, including by its top ally the United States, against invading Rafah. But the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears to be ignoring those calls and proceeding with the assault.

Last week, Israeli forces seized the Rafah crossing that links Gaza to Egypt. The gate, which had served as a major artery for life-saving aid and an entry and exit point for humanitarian workers, has been closed since May 7th.

The closure of the Rafah crossing has trapped thousands of sick and injured Palestinians who may have had a chance to leave Gaza to receive treatment abroad. Before the assault began, Rafah was home to 1.5 million people, most of whom had been displaced from other parts of Gaza.

Throughout the war, Israel has ordered Palestinian civilians in Gaza to move south as it invaded the territory from the north. Many residents were first displaced to the middle part of the enclave and then moved to the southern city of Khan Younis. They were ultimately forced to flee again to Rafah. Now people from Rafah are fleeing northward.

Netanyahu has portrayed Rafah as the last Hamas stronghold in the territory. But as the Israeli army invades the city, fighting is raging in Jabalia and the Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City in the north of the enclave.

Israel said in January that it had dismantled Hamas's "military framework" in the north.

On Saturday, the Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military wing, claimed several attacks against Israeli forces, including targeting military vehicles with rocket propelled grenades in Rafah and Jabalia. The group also said it killed 20 Israeli soldiers in two separate operations in Rafah.

For its part, the Israeli military announced that it recovered the remains of Israeli captive Ron Binyamin, whom it said was killed during Hamas's October 7 attack on southern Israel. Israel had said a day earlier

found the bodies of three other captives based on new intelligence.

But Hamas appeared to play down the significance of the Israeli announcement. "The enemy's leadership is pushing its soldiers into the alleyway of Gaza to return in coffins, so they can look for the remains of some captives that it [Israel] targeted and killed earlier," Abu Obaida, the Qassam Brigades spokesperson said in a statement.

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