

Observers say Rafah is pressure cooker of despair amid Israeli attacks

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Displaced Palestinians carry water jerrycans in the rain at a makeshift camp in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on February 2, 2024. (Photo by AFP)

Rafah, February 3 (RHC)--The United Nations has warned that Rafah, a city declared a "safe zone" by Israel in southern Gaza, has turned into a "pressure cooker of despair" after the regime threatened it could be the next target of its military forces.

Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) made remarks Friday as thousands of Palestinians are fleeing to the town to take refuge there. He told a briefing in Geneva about the people rushing southwards. "Are they truly safe? No. There's no safe place in Gaza; also not in Rafah."

"Rafah is a pressure cooker of despair, and we fear for what comes next," he said adding: "Every week we think it can't get any worse. Well, go figure: it gets worse."

More than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people are sheltering in the area, mainly cold and hungry in makeshift tents and public buildings.

Rafah, a town of around 200,000 people, is now sheltering more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people population, according to Richard Peepkorn, the World Health Organization's representative for the occupied Palestinian territories.

"When you hear about potential attacks, it should not happen... Rafah should not be attacked," he said. He made the remarks after Israel's minister of military affairs Yoav Gallant said on Thursday that the regime's forces will push on to Rafah. Gallant said the regime's "victory won't be complete unless the military expands into Rafah."

Volker Turk, UN human rights high commissioner voiced concern about his threats. "This sets off alarm bells for massive civilian casualties and further displacement to unknown location for over 1.5m already vulnerable Palestinians ordered into Rafah."

The regime's military forces have formerly bombed areas to which they had directed Palestinians to "seek safety."

Since it started its war on Gaza in early October, 1.9 million people – 85 percent of Gaza's population – have been internally displaced. The war of aggression has also killed more than 27,000 people so far.

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