

EU's Borrell suggests U.S. stop arming Israel amid fears over Rafah assault

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Brussels, February 12 (RHC)-- European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has urged allies of Israel, primarily the United States, to stop sending it weapons as “too many people” are being killed in Gaza.

Pointing to U.S. President Joe Biden’s comment last week that Israel’s military action was “over the top”, Borrell said on Monday: “Well, if you believe that too many people are being killed, maybe you should provide less arms in order to prevent so many people having been killed.”

"Is [it] not logical?" he asked, in a Brussels news conference alongside Philippe Lazzarini, head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), who is Israel is pressuring to resign. "How many times have you heard the most prominent leaders and foreign ministers around the world saying too many people are being killed?" Borrell asked.

"If the international community believes that this is a slaughter, that too many people are being killed, maybe we have to think about the provision of arms," Borrell added. The chief EU diplomat also slammed an order by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the more than one million Palestinians sheltering in the Gaza city of Rafah need to be "evacuated" ahead of a planned Israeli military operation there.

"They are going to evacuate – where? To the moon? Where are they going to evacuate these people?" Borrell asked.

This is not the first time Borrell expressed concerned over an invasion of the southern Gaza city of Rafah. On Sunday, he said an assault there "would lead to an unspeakable humanitarian catastrophe" and grave tensions with neighbouring Egypt.

Former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis said European countries share responsibility for the atrocities being committed in Gaza. "We Europeans created the problem ... we are playing a vicious role, in its perpetuation," Varoufakis told Al Jazeera.

The former finance minister accused Borrell of hypocrisy for saying not enough pressure was being applied on Israel, asserting that the EU was "collectively arming" Israel. "As we speak, Germany, France, [and] Italy are sending the armaments that are being used in Rafah to kill people," Varoufakis added.

His latest comments came as dozens were killed in Israeli air strikes on Rafah, according to Palestinian health officials, as people there brace for a major offensive on the densely crowded urban area.

Meanwhile, Volker Turk, the UN's human rights chief, has also expressed alarm over an anticipated Israeli ground assault on Rafah. Turk said it is "wholly imaginable what would lie ahead" if the planned incursion is not stopped.

"A potential full-fledged military incursion into Rafah, where some 1.5 million Palestinians are packed against the Egyptian border with nowhere further to flee, is terrifying, given the prospect that an extremely high number of civilians, again mostly children and women, will likely be killed and injured," Turk said in a statement.

Rights groups have also warned that a full-scale assault on Rafah, the last relatively safe area of the enclave, would result in significant civilian casualties. More than half the population of Gaza has crowded into Rafah to escape Israeli bombardment, which has reduced much of the rest of the Gaza Strip to ruins. Most of those in Rafah were displaced by Israeli offensives in northern, central, and eastern Gaza.

Hamas, the Palestinian group that governs Gaza, has warned Israel that a ground offensive in Rafah would jeopardise negotiations on a truce and the exchange of captives and prisoners.

More than 28,340 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in the Israeli assault on Gaza since October, according to Palestinian authorities. The relentless Israeli bombardment and ground offensive have displaced more than 80 percent of the population, according to aid agencies, and reduced much of the territory to rubble.



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