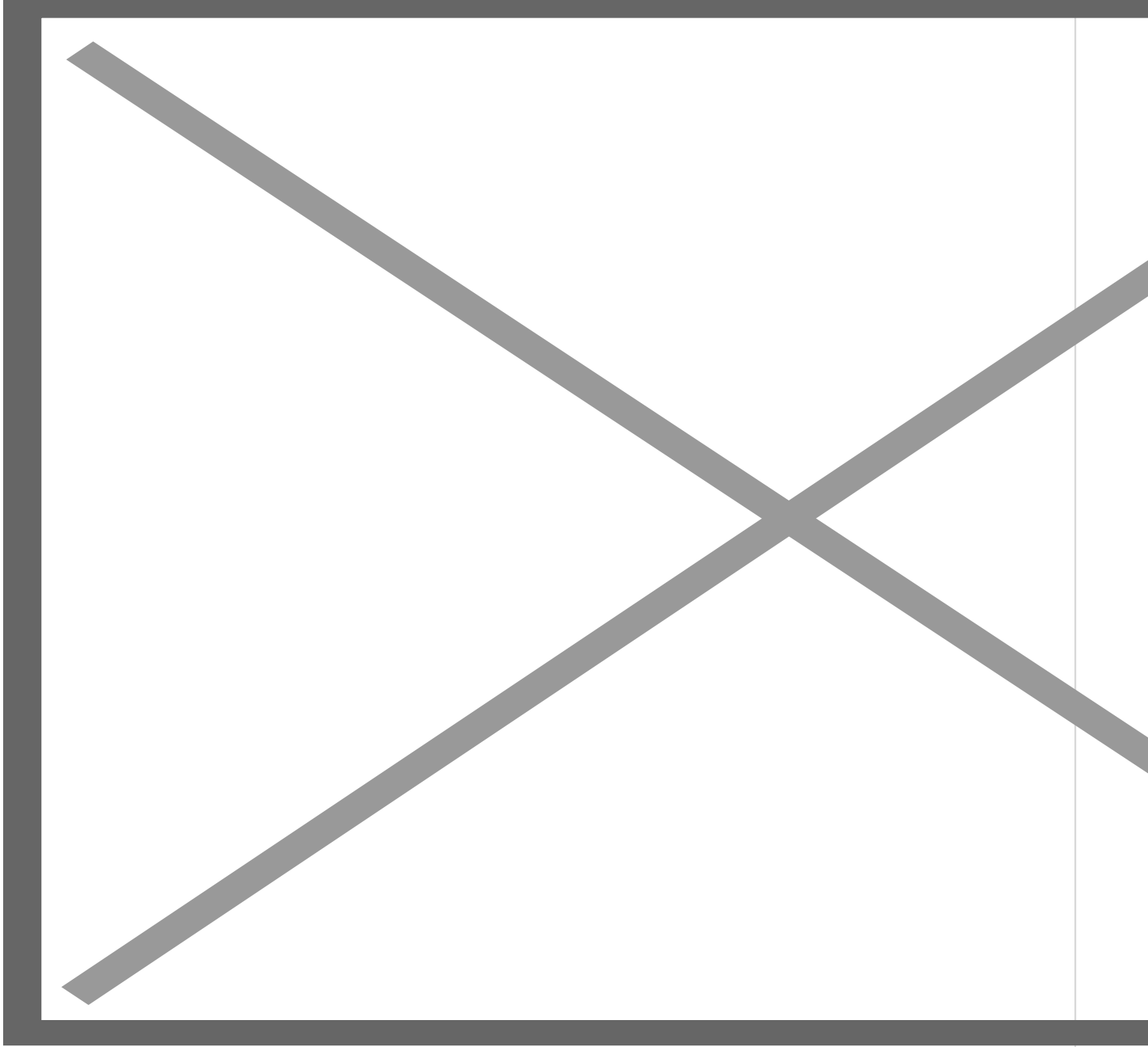


*Spain and Ireland demand EU
review of Israel's human rights
conduct in Gaza*

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Thousands of displaced Palestinians have started to leave Rafah and head towards central Gaza in fear of another Israeli military operation [Mohammed Salem/Reuters]

Madrid, February 15 (RHC)-- The prime ministers of Spain and Ireland have asked the European Commission to urgently review whether Israel is complying with its human rights obligations in Gaza as international pressure grows for Israel to hold off on an assault of the densely packed southern border city of Rafah.

The two leaders said on Wednesday that attacking Rafah poses “a grave and imminent threat that the international community must urgently confront”.

At least 28,576 Palestinians have since been killed in Israeli attacks, the Ministry of Health in Gaza said on Wednesday, mostly women and children.

Spain and Ireland have been particularly outspoken on the topic of Israel’s assault on Gaza in comparison with other European Union states. But a Spanish government source told the Reuters news agency that it was confident that European countries are unifying around a firmer position and for the European Commission to take more concrete action over Israel’s actions in Gaza.

The source pointed to a tweet on Tuesday by Alexander De Croo, the prime minister of Belgium, which said any Rafah operation could generate an “unmitigated humanitarian catastrophe”. Belgium at present holds the presidency of the European Council.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock also said before talks scheduled with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that an offensive on Rafah would jeopardise the humanitarian situation there.

While only Spain and Ireland signed the letter, the source said it expected further backing for a review when ministers meet for the Council of Europe in March. Their intervention follows South Africa’s referral of Israel to the International Court of Justice over allegations it is committing genocide.

The European Commission confirmed receipt of the letter and said it would “look into it”, spokeswoman Arianna Podesta told reporters. “We do urge all sides when it comes to Israel to respect international law, and we note that there must be respect, there must be accountability for violations of international law,” the spokesperson said.

Two weeks ago, Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said he was in talks with other EU heads of government to review the EU-Israel Association Agreement on the basis that Israel may be breaching the agreement’s human rights clause.

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