

Gaza death toll surpasses 30,000 with no let-up in genocidal Israeli bombardment

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Mourners react next to the bodies of those killed in an Israeli attack, at al-Najjar Hospital, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, February 10, 2024 [Ibraheem Abu Mustafa/Reuters]

Rafah, February 29 (RHC)-- More than 70 people have been killed after Israeli forces fired at Palestinians collecting food aid in the Gaza Strip, taking the total death toll to more than 30,000 since the beginning of Israel's war on Gaza nearly five months ago, according to the Ministry of Health in the besieged enclave.

The ministry's update on Thursday comes amid a deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, on the brink of famine, as the Israeli military threatens a ground invasion of Rafah, where about 1.5 million people, most of them were displaced by the war, are sheltering.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, head of the World Health Organization, called for a ceasefire on social media, saying the "horrific violence and suffering" must end. More than 70,000 Palestinians had been injured, he said.

Ignoring international condemnation, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated a few days ago that the campaign against Rafah, the main entry point for urgently needed supplies of food and medicine, "will happen." A captive-prisoner swap deal, being discussed as part of an Israel-Hamas truce negotiations mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States, would only "delay" an assault on the crowded city, he said.

Reporting from occupied East Jerusalem, Al Jazeera's Willem Marx said: "If that area becomes the centre of the conflict, that would have a devastating impact yet again on the ability of aid agencies to move food into these population areas that need it so much."

Citing the deteriorating conditions in Gaza, Samantha Power, head of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), said Israel needed to open more crossings so that "vitally needed humanitarian assistance can be dramatically surged". "This is a matter of life and death," she said in a video posted on X.

Officials from the United Nations aid agencies have accused Israel of "systematically" blocking aid from reaching desperate Palestinians in Gaza, warning that at least one-quarter of the enclave's population is a step away from famine.

The Israeli military has also systematically attacked Palestinians waiting for whatever meagre supplies of food aid are available. On Thursday, it was reported that soldiers opened fire on civilians waiting for flour for their families in Gaza City, killing more than 100 Palestinians in an attack described as a cold-blooded "massacre" by the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates.

On the same day, it was also reported that Israeli air raids and shelling had killed at least 30 people in separate attacks in Nuseirat, Bureij and Khan Younis refugee camps in Gaza.

Hospitals are buckling under the strain of coping with so many inpatients. Children have died "due to malnutrition, dehydration and widespread famine" at Gaza City's al-Shifa hospital, said Health Ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qudra, who called for "immediate action" from international organisations.

The ministry said of the 30,035 people killed so far in the conflict, more than 13,000 were children and 8,800 women. At least 70,457 people have been injured, of which more than 11,000 are in critical condition and need to be evacuated.

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