

UN chief calls for immediate ceasefire in Gaza, warns of humanitarian disaster

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The picture released by the United Nations press office shows UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres meeting with a Palestinian child evacuated from the Gaza Strip receiving treatment at

**the general hospital in El-Arish in Egypt's northeastern North Sinai province on March 23, 2024.
(Photo by AFP)**

Amman, March 25 (RHC)-- UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres says there is growing international consensus on the need to establish a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, which has been under Israeli attacks since October.

Speaking during a visit to Jordan on Monday, Guterres said Israel should be notified that its planned ground invasion of the city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip would cause a humanitarian disaster. "We see a growing consensus emerging in the international community to tell the Israelis that the ceasefire is needed," he told a news conference.

There is also a growing consensus in the United States, the European Union and of course in the Muslim world "to tell clearly to Israelis that any ground invasion of Rafah could mean a humanitarian disaster," the UN chief added.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu on March 17 reiterated that Israel would push on with its planned ground offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where about 1.4 million displaced Palestinians have sought shelter. This is in spite of warnings issued by Israel's allies and critics against the invasion of Rafah, fearing mass civilian casualties and humanitarian catastrophe.

In a ceremony in Cairo to receive the UN chief on Sunday, the grand imam of Egypt's Al Azhar University Sheikh Ahmed al Tayeb decried the "disappointing and frustrating" the international community's reactions to Israel's war on the besieged Gaza Strip. "What is happening in Gaza threatens to undermine the efforts of communication and rapprochement that we have been undertaking for years and attempts to bridge the gap between East and West," a statement from Al Azhar quoted Tayeb as saying. The global response to Israel's war on Gaza was unlike that of the people in Western societies, he added.

"We have seen great fairness from Western and American peoples, and even from some fair-minded Jews who came out to demand an end to the aggression on Gaza," the grand imam said.

Emphasizing that the world is moving in the "wrong" direction without moral controls, he warned, "If this situation continues, we will see an unprecedented spread of crime, hatred, and acts of violence." He cautioned that the ongoing conflict would spill over the Western countries and the United States.

According to the statement, Tayeb and Guterres discussed the latest developments in Gaza.

The UN chief, for his part, hailed Al Azhar's role as a strong voice defending and supporting the people of Palestine, besides pressuring the international community to respect the rights of the Palestinians and reduce their suffering.

Guterres said his visit to the gates of the besieged Gaza Strip at the Rafah border crossing on Saturday aimed to "send a message about the necessity of stopping the aggression and for the international community to fulfill its duties with decisions and not just words." He emphasized that the Palestinians are suffering from severe shortages of food and drink and the spread of various infectious diseases.

"We all have to highlight and stop this suffering immediately. It is our responsibility," the UN chief pointed out. He once again reaffirmed his continued support for justice in Gaza and said, "No one will be able to silence his voice."

The United Nations has repeatedly warned of famine in the Palestinian territory, particularly in the north, which has been largely cut off from aid deliveries.

Israel waged its brutal US-backed war on the Gaza Strip on October 7 after the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas carried out a historic operation against the usurping entity in retaliation for the regime's intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people.

However, almost six months into the offensive, the Tel Aviv regime has failed to achieve its objectives of "destroying Hamas" and finding Israeli captives despite killing at least 32,226 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injuring 74,518 others.

The regime has imposed a "complete siege" on the territory, cutting off fuel, electricity, food and water to the Palestinians living there.

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