

Thousands flee southern Gaza as Israel mounts new assault

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Ali Abu Ismehan, a wounded Palestinian evacuated from the European Hospital, is wheeled on a bed at Nasser Hospital, in Khan Younis, on July 2, 2024 [Mohammed Salem/Reuters]

Khan Younis, July 2 (RHC)--Thousands of Palestinians are fleeing their homes in Gaza's Khan Younis as Israeli forces pound the area with bombs and artillery fire after issuing a new evacuation order for the embattled southern city.

The latest strikes on Tuesday killed at least eight people and wounded more than 30 in several neighbourhoods of Khan Younis.

The wave of attacks, just weeks after Israeli tanks left the area, caused panic among residents, many already displaced multiple times and with no clear path to safety. The Israeli military's newly declared evacuation zone in Khan Younis encompasses an area where 250,000 people live, said Sam Rose, planning director at the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The order "means yet another day, week, chapter of misery for these hundreds of thousands of people – we expect 250,000 people in areas under the evacuation order," Rose told Al Jazeera from Nuseirat in central Gaza.

Some had just returned from Rafah, also in the south of the enclave, where they were displaced a few weeks ago. "And now they just received this evacuation order instructing them to leave immediately ... It's just harrowing, horrific and incredibly difficult to get your head around," Rose said. It also includes Gaza's European Hospital, which serves both Khan Younis and Rafah.

The evacuation order shows Israel's inability to achieve its goal of eliminating Hamas and its intent to exhaust the population, said Luciano Zaccara, a professor of Gulf politics at Qatar University's Gulf Studies Center.

"It also proves that Israel wants to 'win' this war by exhausting the people," he told Al Jazeera, referring to several previous such orders from different locations in the past nine months of war.

"In this way, it creates much more trouble and harm for Palestinians who cannot stay for more than one month or 15 days in one place," he added. Some residents fled west towards the al-Mawasi area by the beach, which Israel designated a humanitarian "safe zone" but has attacked. But it is already overcrowded with displaced families.

The idea that there are safe places to move people to, Zaccara said, "is not true because every time there has been a displacement there were also attacks."

There is no space in al-Mawasi to pitch a tent, there is no water, no infrastructure, no sanitary services, Rose said, with many people forced to spend the night in vehicles or on their donkey carts.

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