



State of Palestine  
Child Protection AoR

## **oPt Protection Cluster & Global Protection Cluster Joint Statement 3 May 2024**

### **Civilians Lives on the Line: Risks of Further Harm and Severe Suffering with Potential Rafah Incursion**

For 2.3 million people in the Gaza Strip, their lives are in the balance. They face death and injury from Israeli strikes, from explosive ordnance and collapsing buildings, with undersupplied and under threat hospitals and severe restrictions on access to life-saving services. Even accessing assistance, when allowed, has become a dangerous task. The potential incursion in Rafah and the multitude of consequences will make the already catastrophic situation impossible. Unthinkable.

The Protection Cluster for the occupied Palestinian territory, its Areas of Responsibility and partners monitor key protection risks, including attacks on civilians, child and forced family separation, Gender-Based Violence, denial of humanitarian aid and access, restriction of freedom of movement and forced displacement. Each risk is devastating on its own and yet for so many people in Gaza, they are faced with many - if not all these – risks, all at extreme levels. The World Food Programme is reporting famine in northern Gaza. Air strikes continue in central and southern areas. No where is safe in Gaza.

Importantly, this situation is not an inevitable tragedy of conflict. It is due to the specific choices made by Israel in its conduct of hostilities following the horrific attacks by Hamas and Palestinian armed groups on 07 October. Israel's actions over the past seven months include the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas, attacks on hospitals and clinics, targeting of civilian social structures and continued cuts to water and electricity supplies. Respect of international humanitarian law is an obligation for all parties.

Social and cultural life has been torn apart. We have witnessed the repeated displacement of people, the staggering loss of life – specifically of women and children – and the strain placed by the infrastructural and economic decimation of Gaza. All of this has led to the systematic destruction of the fabric of life in Gaza and stretched any sense of community and individual resilience to its absolute breaking point. Within this context of incomprehensible levels of need, continued restrictions on the entry of aid and fuel, and limitations on the movement of humanitarians on the ground is even more alarming.

Amidst ongoing efforts to provide life-saving humanitarian aid and protection where and when possible to civilians in Gaza, it is with horror that we hear the threats of a full invasion of Rafah. The safety of hundreds of thousands of people is at stake. We fear for the potential arbitrary detention of men and boys. We fear the extreme vulnerability of women and children who will displace again into more overcrowded and more unsafe locations. We worry for how elderly and disabled people will endure being displaced once more. We worry for pregnant women who have nowhere to deliver their babies safely. We fear for the increased danger people will face from continued aerial attacks and explosive ordinances. We fear for the lives of the remaining hostages in Gaza. We fear for the safety of our partners. We are concerned that assistance will not be allowed into Gaza and that what is allowed in will never match the needs people have.

The Rafah incursion is not inevitable, and the international community should not treat it this way. The protection of civilians in Gaza must remain an absolute priority. Our shared humanity demands it.

- We reiterate our call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire now. It is the only way to prevent further suffering and harm to civilians in Gaza.
- As required under International Humanitarian Law and as ordered by the ICJ, Israel must adopt intentional strategies and actions that reduce harms to civilians.
- Israel must stop further attacks on Rafah and other areas where civilians are seeking safety.
- We call for the urgent increase in meaningful humanitarian access into Gaza, particularly via land crossings, and throughout the Strip.

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