

Imminent risks of mass atrocity crimes in Rafah

Only a ceasefire can bring safety to the civilians at risk

Prime Minister Netanyahu has ordered the evacuation of Rafah in preparation for the massive expansion of the Israeli offensive. **As an organisation with deep expertise in the dynamics of mass atrocity violence, we believe that without robust and rapid leverage of coordinated protective and preventive measures – or without an immediate ceasefire – consequences for the 1.3 million people in Rafah will be catastrophic.**

It is imperative that the British parliament recognises the threat to Rafah for what it is and stands together to support calls for a ceasefire. We urge Members of Parliament and the UK government to not hide behind disagreements over semantics; no matter what we call it, only an immediate cessation of violence can bring a halt the violations that are being committed under the cover of armed conflict and devastating the lives of civilians. We ask Members to put aside party politics and unite against mass atrocity violence.

Rafah is currently hosting over half of Gaza's 2.3 million traumatised population. Despite Israel having told displaced Palestinians to flee there, the city is being subjected to the Israeli military's increasingly intense bombardment. **The UK government and our parliament must acknowledge Netanyahu's intentions for Rafah and uphold their obligations to protect its beleaguered population.**

The US have made Rafah a redline by saying the operation 'cannot proceed' and the UK must do the same. However, simply saying so is never sufficient to halt such violence; Assad's continued use of chemical weapons made that clear. So too did the siege of Srebrenica which, after repeated warnings, fell in 1995 and saw genocide return to Europe. **Those policy mistakes and their dreadful consequences for the people of Syria, Bosnia, and elsewhere must be recalled and learned from in these crucial days.**

Responses to these rare warnings of extreme imminent threat shape the moral identity of states for years to come. With the order to evacuate Rafah and public preparations for a massive offensive, Prime Minister Netanyahu has forced such a juncture. **Parliament must uphold its moral obligations and recognise that only a halt to the violence will bring an end to these violations.**

Israel's deliberate perpetration of the gravest international crimes is first and foremost an assault upon the Palestinian people, bringing devastation to millions and threatening the very future of a Palestinian state. Israel's actions are also an attack on the international system and the universal values that underpin it. **Failure to successfully confront the violations committed by both Hamas and Israel will have overwhelming immediate and long-term consequences for the safety, stability, and security of practically every region in the world – including the UK.**

We most urgently call upon Members of Parliament to:

- **Unreservedly back the cessation of violence by all parties by voting in support of a ceasefire.**
- **Be resolute in reminding the UK Government of its obligations to abide by, support, and help uphold international law and to actively endeavour to prevent violations and protect civilians.**
- **Call urgently for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes to finally be made a distinct pillar of the UK's crisis response.**

We continue to urge the Government to:

- Prioritise the unfettered access of and contribution to humanitarian aid.
- Maintain their efforts towards the immediate and safe return of all hostages.
- To ensure that UK officials are able to properly centre its treaty and ethical obligations across its responses to the crisis, and resource UK country teams and relevant officials with urgent atrocity prevention and response training, expertise, guidance and leadership.
- Ensure that it not only publicly supports the measures issued by the ICJ but also does so in practice through its policy. As a party to the Genocide Convention, the UK is bound to ensure it helps prevent violations and ensure it is not complicit in violations of the Convention.
- Immediately cease all transfer of arms and military equipment, including components, or risk breaching its own obligations to prevent atrocity crimes and, plausibly, risk becoming complicit in violations of the Genocide Convention. This is in addition to other UK obligations under Strategic Export Licencing Criteria including the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).
- Unreservedly support the open investigation by the International Criminal Court into crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court that are alleged to have been committed in the Situation of Palestine since 13 June 2014 to ensure all violations committed by Hamas, the Israeli military, and any other actor, are investigated and brought to trial.
- Activate urgent dialogue via existing forums for atrocity prevention, including by but not limited to International Atrocity Prevention Working Group, the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, in its bilateral relations with the US and others.
- Acknowledge and respond responsibly to the increase in domestic identity-based violence, hate crime and hate incidents, including but not limited to islamophobia and antisemitism. If these tensions are deliberately stoked, risks of identity-based violence including violent extremism rise further.

Siege tactics, the use of collective punishment, forced deportations, the targeting of civilians, hospitals, schools, housing blocks, are serious violations of International Humanitarian Law and the Rome Statute.

Such violations must always be condemned, efforts prioritised to slow down and halt the trajectory of violence, and ultimately investigated and punished. **Failure to do so consistently allows impunity to flourish everywhere. We ask you most gravely to confront the trajectory of mass atrocity violence in Gaza and to support the vote for a ceasefire.**