

By Ghada Ageel
Scholar

OPINION

If we listen to world leaders, we could be lulled into believing that Rafah has been a place of safety. But this city, nestled in the southern part of the Gaza Strip, has been on the threshold of terror since Israel launched its genocidal assault on October 7. The daily toll of genocide and destruction has been devastating even without a ground invasion.

Six months ago, an Israeli air strike targeted the home of my relative Ayman in Rafah. It was October 21, and the whole family was at home preparing to celebrate the birthdays of his children Sham and Adam; Sham was turning nine and Adam three.

Ayman had gone upstairs to check if the water tank was filled when the bombs fell, killing his two children, two of his sisters-in-law, their five children, and four other relatives.

Ayman's wife, Dareen, was critically wounded in the attack. She was hanging clothes on the balcony when the rocket struck the building, hurling her to the other side of the street. When Ayman reached her, she was still breathing. She pleaded with him to rescue their baby girl.

As she was dying, Dareen was rushed to the hospital in a desperate bid to save their unborn child. Doctors fought valiantly, performing a caesarean section to bring to this cruel world a fragile baby.

Ayman named her Mecca, as they had agreed with Dareen. However, her mother's death and the lack of oxygen had already taken their toll. Mecca struggled for three days, her tiny body ravaged by convulsions. On the third day, she too passed away. All that was left of their family was a father with a broken heart and a date of birth and a date of departure seared into his soul.

Since October, many families in Rafah have met the horrific fate of Ayman's family. Israel's slaughter from the air never subsided, even as it ordered more than a million people in the north of the Gaza Strip to evacuate south.

Instead of safety, Palestinians who fled south found death once again raining on them. In a recent weekend, dozens were killed, most of them children.

On Friday, April 19, Israel bom-

Rafah: Past the point of no return



Displaced Palestinians travel on a cart away from Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, on May 7, 2024, following the IDF's evacuation order and ground invasion. AFP

barded Tal as-Sultan neighbourhood where the Radwan and Joudah families had sought shelter. Abdel-Fattah Radwan, his wife Najlaa Aweidah, and their three children Leen, Nadya, and Amer died. Also killed were Abdel-Fattah's sister, Rawan, and her five-year-old daughter Alaa. Hamza and Sama Zaqout were visiting the apartment to play with the other children. They also died.

On Saturday, April 20, Israeli bombs wiped out most of the Abdel Aal family: 15 children and their mothers Yasmeen, Sujoud, and Rasha as well as their grandmother Hamdeh. The loss was staggering — all the family children perished in an instant. The innocent lives of Sidra, Moham-

med, Layan, Yasser, Muhannad, Osama, Ismail, Ahmad, Sajida, Shahd, Abdullah, Yasser, Othman, Ismail, and Mahmoud were cut short in an instant. The place of safety became a graveyard in the blink of an eye.

The horror of this murder was etched on the faces of those who used their bare hands to search the rubble for the bodies of the children.

On the same Saturday, in the heart of Rafah, near al-Awda Mosque, Israeli bombardment killed Shukri Joudeh and his daughter Malak. His pregnant wife, Sabreen, was critically injured and taken to the hospital. A short time after arrival, she was pronounced dead, so the doctors made a desperate at-

tempt to save her unborn child, performing an emergency caesarean section. Miraculously, the baby was delivered alive. She only lived as an orphan in this world for a few days before passing away too.

My teacher Dr Akram Habeeb, an associate professor at the Islamic university in Gaza, which now lies in ruins after being targeted like all Gaza universities by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), penned a prayer born of desperation:

When will we stop counting our death toll?
When will the church in Rome start to toll?
When will Mercy be in your hearts for our death knell?
When will you commence our

true tale to tell?

When will the Security Council have its will?

When will the world put out Gaza's hell?

When will the world stop seeing us as numbers on screens?

When will the criminals stop killing our children's dreams?

When will justice wear its crown to declare our cause?

When will the war on Gaza end, or even just, to pause?

The questions of Dr Habeeb echo the collective anguish of 2.2 million Palestinians experiencing genocide. Some 1.5 million of them are in Rafah with nowhere else to go.

The news that the United States government has provided the IDF with \$17bn more in military

aid to continue its genocide in Gaza has only deepened Palestinian despair.

And yet, there is a glimmer of hope: the campus protests taking place across the US, Europe, and other places. They demonstrate that the younger generations know the path of justice.

The need for an end to the genocide, accountability, and meaningful change has never been more pressing. It is imperative that good people everywhere keep the pressure so we can have a free Palestine and consign any perpetrators of genocide to the dustbin of history.

The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.

By Ziad Taleb
Reporter

PERSPECTIVE

Displacement after displacement. That describes the reality facing thousands of Palestinian families in Gaza who took Rashid Street from Rafah to the centre of the Gaza Strip after receiving evacuation orders from Israeli authorities on Monday to move to Al-Mawasi, a coastal area of the besieged enclave.

Stranded, their homes demolished, loved ones killed, and repeatedly displaced on their land, they had sought refuge in Rafah in the far southern reaches of the Strip to escape death and destruction and to find a safe place that does not exist.

Journey into the unknown

Thousands of Gazan families flee Rafah

They are now heading along the coastal road again to an unknown fate with the start of military operations in the eastern areas of Rafah.

UN News's Ziad Taleb, who is in Gaza, spoke with several Palestinians who made the journey.

'Every hour we are displaced'

Sobhi Massoud shared his confusion at the new developments. The elderly man has been displaced several times after all his children were killed and his property was destroyed in Jabalia camp. He finally ended up in

the city of Rafah, which Israeli authorities have declared a safe zone.

But his suffering did not end there.

"Every day we are displaced. Every hour we are displaced," he said.

He explained that he had been forced to flee again to the Al-Mawasi area, which lacks the most basic necessities. He pointed to his cane on which he leaned.

"It's all gone," Mr. Massoud said. "This is the one thing that remains. I can't even find a mattress to sleep on."

'Fed up with life'

Abu Kamal al-Yaziji, who was displaced from Gaza City in the north, said what was happening in the enclave was unprecedented.

Directing his voice to the Israeli authorities, he said "this is not a self-defense operation; what you are doing is revenge."

He added that if he had the opportunity to sell his property even at half its value to send his children and grandchildren out of Gaza, he would have done so to secure their future.

"I am fed up with life. There is no life in Gaza," he said.

"Gaza has no future. The people of Gaza have never seen such suffering. What is happening now is something we have never seen nor felt nor will see again in our lifetimes."

'Gaza has nothing but God'

Young Mohammed Salah Rajab's journey began in the Zeitoun neighbourhood, then on to his sister's house in Khan Younis and then to the Hay al-Salam area in Rafah.

After the shelling of the past few days and being informed the need to evacuate along with other residents, he took refuge

in Deir Al-Balah, which is an area adjacent to Al-Mawasi. Mr. Rajab said he does not know what awaits him now.

"We don't know what our fate is," he said. "We expected the ceasefire deal would be reached, and we would go to Gaza City, but the opposite happened. Only God knows what will happen to us." The young Gazan hoped that his voice would reach the world outside.

"Gaza has nothing but God," he said.

The article first appeared on UN News.