

Israel-Hamas war

Israel faces wave of condemnation over strike on Rafah camp

European and Arab nations join calls for Israel to halt attacks in southern Gaza after deaths in crowded tent city



Palestinians inspect the damage at a camp for displaced people in Rafah on Monday after what authorities in Gaza said were Israeli air strikes © Haitham Imad/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

James Shotter in Jerusalem and **Henry Foy** in Brussels 21 MINUTES AGO

Israel faced widespread international condemnation on Monday after dozens of people in a camp for displaced civilians in Rafah were killed in what authorities in Gaza said was an Israeli air strike.

Palestinian health officials said at least 35 people had been killed and dozens more injured, after fires and explosions [ripped through the crowded tent city](#) in Rafah's Tal as-Sultan neighbourhood, which housed people who had fled the fighting elsewhere in the besieged enclave.

Israel's military prosecutor described the events as "very difficult", adding that Israel was investigating the incident and regretted "any harm to uninvolved civilians". The Israeli military had previously said it targeted a " Hamas compound " in the area.

However, the deaths — which came just two days after the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to "immediately halt" its offensive in the southern Gaza city — sparked a wave of international criticism.

French President Emmanuel Macron said he was "outraged by the Israeli strikes that have killed many displaced persons in Rafah".

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These operations must stop. There are no safe areas in Gaza for Palestinian civilians. I call for full respect for international law and an immediate ceasefire,” he wrote on X.

Italy’s defence minister Guido Crosetto said “the Palestinian people are being squeezed without regard for the rights of innocent men, women and children who have nothing to do with Hamas”.

“This can no longer be justified,” he said in a television interview.

Arab nations, including Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, also condemned the strike, with Qatar warning it could hinder attempts to broker a deal for a ceasefire and the release of Israeli hostages still held by Hamas in Gaza. Egypt accused Israel of “targeting unarmed civilians”, describing the strike as a “blatant breach” of international humanitarian law.

UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, said there were “reports of mass casualties including children and women among those killed” in the “horrifying” incident. “Gaza is hell on earth. Images from last night are yet another testament to that,” it said.

Meanwhile, European diplomats demanded Israel comply with the ICJ’s order, with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell saying “everybody agrees that the rulings of the International Court of Justice are binding, and they have to be implemented”.

His comments were echoed by Germany’s foreign minister Annalena Baerbock and her counterpart in Spain, José Manuel Albares. Albares said the ministers would discuss how to “take the right measures to enforce that decision”.

According to Palestinian officials, Israel’s assault in Gaza has so far killed 36,000 people, displaced 1.7mn of its 2.3mn citizens and reduced most of the enclave to uninhabitable rubble. Israel launched its offensive in response to Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel, in which militants killed 1,200 people, and took 250 hostage, according to Israeli officials.

The UN’s top court ordered [Israel](#) on Friday to “immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”.

“Unhappily, what we have seen in the immediate hours is that Israel has continued the military action that it has been asked to stop,” Borrell said, noting that Hamas has

also continued to fire rockets at Israel. “This is really a dilemma, how the international community can . . . force the implementation of the decision of the ICJ.”

Israeli officials have repeatedly insisted that an operation in Rafah is necessary to defeat [Hamas](#). Tzachi Hanegbi, the country’s national security adviser, claimed on Saturday that the wording of the order was not a blanket prohibition on Israeli forces operating in Rafah.

“What they are asking us, is not to commit genocide in Rafah. We did not commit genocide and we will not commit genocide,” he said in an interview with Israel’s N12 TV.

“According to international law, we have the right to defend ourselves and the evidence is that the court is not preventing us from continuing to defend ourselves.”

The ICJ’s order capped a week of diplomatic setbacks for Israel, during which three European states said they would recognise Palestine, and the prosecutor at the separate International Criminal Court sought arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and defence minister Yoav Gallant, as well as three Hamas leaders.

Borrell said the work of the ICC had to be “respected” and defended the prosecutor, Karim Khan, who faced intense criticism from Israel and its allies for his decision to seek warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant.

Additional reporting by Heba Saleh in Cairo

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