**Gaza: hell on earth**

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When on May 6, news spread that Hamas had accepted a truce proposal, celebrations broke out across Gaza. People took to the streets cheering, believing the war – the seven months of hell – was over. I was sceptical, but I too teared up at the thought that the horror may be over.

Soon it became clear that only one side had accepted the deal. The other was dead set on continuing its brutal massacres of Palestinians. Israel pushed ahead with its invasion of Rafah, where more than a million people from the north and central part of the strip had sought refuge, believing Israeli assurances that this was a “safe zone”.

On May 7, the Israeli army captured the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, the only way out for Palestinians who could find the means to evacuate and the injured and sick who have managed to get Israeli permission to leave. It was also the main access point for the little humanitarian aid Israel was allowing to get into the strip.

My family and I had been trying to find a way out of Gaza. The news struck down what little hope we had of leaving. We truly have nowhere to go now as we face death by bombing, starvation or disease.

Israel is presenting its evacuation orders to the rest of the world as care for Palestinian civilians. But Israel knows that pushing people from place to place every few weeks is a form of torture.

More than half a million Palestinians have fled Rafah, the United Nations reports. Families who have already been displaced multiple times have had to pack their belongings once again and head into uncertainty.

Contrary to its claims made to Western media, Israel has not made any provisions for the evacuation. People who flee have to pay for private cars or animal-drawn carts to move them. Those who have no money try to walk. Some are too impoverished or have sick or elderly family members and cannot make the trip.

The half a million people who have left Rafah have had to move in with relatives – if they are lucky – or set up tents wherever they find space. No food, water or other basic necessities are provided for them. Most of all, there is no guarantee of safety. Just a day ago, a family who had just fled Rafah was killed when the Israeli army bombed a house in Nuseirat camp.

The movement of this huge number of people puts immense strain on the communities they move into. Fights have broken out at queues for water and bread. The price of basic foodstuffs has skyrocketed. This constant forced eviction of people is tearing apart the social fabric of Palestinian society.

Life in displacement is what no child, no adult should experience. People are crammed into rooms or tents, sometimes more than a dozen of them. There are no toilets, showers, proper sanitation. There is no privacy or personal space.

Diseases, once eradicated, are now widespread. People contract hepatitis and stomach viruses regularly.

As temperatures soar, heat stroke is claiming lives, including of babies and children.

Israel’s constant forced evictions of already displaced Palestinians are also breaking what little semblance of normalcy parents try to establish for their children.

A month ago, I visited one of the camps in Rafah. There I met Nesreen Ayoub, who had been forced to flee her home in Gaza City with her family.

Having lost so much, she found some solace in her daughter, Tasneem, attending classes in a makeshift school and returning to their tent with a glimmer of joy, a rare commodity in these desperate times.

Teachers and university graduates were volunteering to teach children, hoping to lift their spirits amid the despair. I also met Samia al-Khor, an Arabic teacher, who had also fled from the north. Her yearning for the familiar rhythm of the classroom had pushed her to gather children eager to learn and teach them the Arabic language on a piece of rubble she had transformed into a blackboard.

The camp was one of the first areas in Rafah that Israel ordered to evacuate. The makeshift classrooms have been dismantled, the joy of learning – denied.

Palestinians must be deprived of even the smallest moments of happiness. Such is the Israeli thinking. Remember the outrage on Israeli media at the scenes of Palestinian children trying to cool down in the sea amid the sweltering heat? There must be no respite for Palestinians. They must be condemned to eternal suffering.

As Palestinian author Susan Abulhawa recently reminded us in an essay, Israel Shahak, a survivor of the Holocaust and an Israeli intellectual, was one of the first to see a reflection of Nazism in Israel. In a 1983 essay, he wrote that he noticed the Israeli tendency towards what he called “Nazification” as early as 1968, a year after the Israeli army occupied the West Bank and Gaza.

“It is now a commonplace to assert that most of the horrors of Hitler could have been prevented had the Nazis’ intentions and early practices been recognized for what they were. The same is true for Israeli Nazism. It can yet be stopped if it will be seen for what it is,” Shahak wrote.

For four decades, his warning was not heeded. And we have arrived at the point where Israel is carrying out genocide in Gaza, unperturbed by global outrage.

Gaza is “hell on earth”, as the UN has said. The sound of drones and fighter jets, the roar of bombing and shelling, the smell of decomposing bodies and raw sewage, the sight of levelled neighbourhoods, the convulsions of starvation and thirst, the agony of the loss of loved ones reign supreme across this small strip of land.

The prevailing emotions are not of resilience but of anguish, despair and terror. The myth of Palestinian endurance is collapsing in the face of the unimaginable suffering inflicted on Palestinians by Israel.

This article was originally published as: ‘The evacuation of Rafah is yet another form of Israeli torture’.

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