

Australia: Thousands rally against Israeli Gaza attacks

Our reporters
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About 3,000 people demonstrated in central Melbourne yesterday against the Israeli military's bombardment of the Palestinian people in Gaza. The rally, called at short notice by the Palestinian Community Association and Justice for Palestine, was attended by a broad range of people. In addition to families from Palestine and the Middle East, working people and students from many different backgrounds gathered to express their opposition to the Zionist state's war crimes. The demonstration followed a 2,500-strong protest in central Sydney on Monday.

Many of the Melbourne demonstrators carried home-made banners, including: "This is not retaliation—Israeli strikes are murder", "Who's the Terrorist?", "Your silence condemns killing of civilians", "350 killed—shame Israel", "Stop Israeli crimes—End Gaza siege", and "If we don't stand up for children then we don't stand for much".

Protestors chanted slogans demanding a halt to the bombing and for the lifting of the protracted Israeli siege of Gaza as they marched from the State Library to Federation Square. A minute's silence was observed for the hundreds of civilian victims, including the five girls from one family in the Jabaliya refugee camp who were killed as they slept when an Israeli bomb attack collapsed their house.

Several protestors waved shoes in the air—referring to the incident in Baghdad earlier this month when US President George Bush was forced to duck to avoid shoes thrown by an infuriated Iraqi journalist denouncing US war crimes in his country. Protestors in Australia were clearly aware that the Israeli government's aggression was only possible because of the political, military, and economic support lent to it by US imperialism.

Many also expressed their opposition to the Labor government's wholehearted backing of the Israeli government's

pretext for its attack. On Sunday, acting Prime Minister Julia Gillard declared: "Obviously, [Hamas] have broken the ceasefire and engaged in an act of aggression against Israel. Israel has responded."

One of the speakers at the rally drew attention to an article published by *Israel Today* that was titled "US, Australia back Gaza strike; rest of the world doesn't".

Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party distributed copies of recent *World Socialist Web Site* perspectives "Washington bears guilt for Gaza war crimes" and "The Gaza crisis and the perspective of permanent revolution". WSWS reporters also interviewed several of those attending the rally.

Assia Haouli works as a teacher at the Australian International Academy. "I'm from Lebanon," she said. "I see a relationship between Israel invading Lebanon in 2006 and this attack. Israel wasn't successful in Lebanon and now they need to show an alternative, and they found Palestine to be much easier—an easier target. I think that is one of the main reasons for the attack.

"My parents migrated here because of the war in Lebanon in the 1980s. I had friends in the war zone area, and the atrocities they saw, the destruction... When you're a five-year-old and you see children dying in front of you, it will scar you for life. I have two younger sisters and they just look at these little children in Gaza that are now dying. How do we explain to our children what is happening to those children overseas?

"Since I come from Lebanon I watch a lot of different news services—not only [Australian commercial networks] Channel 7, 9, and 10. I see different opinions from around the world. One interesting point is that the elections in Israel are coming up; the calculation is that this assault will get many votes.

"I don't see Israel listening to anyone. They do their own

thing. They see worldwide condemnation—except for the US. I think that is the country that has to halt this... I wouldn't be surprised if the US supplied billions more of taxpayers' money to Israel. The weapons being used are from the US. I had a lot of hope in Obama, but that has deteriorated. I assumed Obama would act immediately rather than staying on the sidelines."

Assia also condemned the response of governments in the Middle East: "The Arabs are silent. Which Arab leader has said, 'No you've got to put a stop to this'? I can't believe what Egypt is doing—the support that they're giving to Israel. The fact that a few days ago, the defence minister in Egypt was seen giving strong support for Israel. The people don't support Israel, but the leaders of Egypt do—I just see there are hidden motives, but I'm not sure, I need to find that out. It's the first thing I am going to look up. I don't see anybody stopping this war. I hope our voices are being heard. At least the Arab leaders should. I believe the Arab leaders are allowing Israel to do this."

Imad, a real estate agent, explained why he was attending the protest. "We all came to express our feeling for the Palestinian people in Gaza," he said. "No human on earth should just sit and watch the TV now... The people in Gaza have not been allowed to move in or out for more than two years. They have been blocked in like the Berlin Wall or like what Hitler did to the Jewish people in the concentration camps. Israel now calls this self-defence! What kind of self-defence is this, to massacre innocent people?"

"The role of the media has been miserable. The media is lying about this claim of self-defence—self-defence against people who cannot even find enough bread to eat! Just like they lied about Iraq when they said that there were weapons of mass destruction there.

"Israel has all the power while America supports it. What they could not achieve in Lebanon, they are trying to achieve in Gaza. Israel has weapons of mass destruction. Why doesn't the US stop them? Where's the UN?"

Basil Atatreh is a student of civil engineering at Victoria University. He has relatives living in a village about six kilometres from Jenin, the town in the West Bank where the Israeli army carried out a massacre of Palestinian refugees in 2002.

"The media is biased," he said. "They keep on saying that these rockets that go over from Gaza are missiles. But a missile is a precision guided weapon. That's different from a rocket that doesn't know where it is going and that has killed no-one, injured no-one, just injured soil. The Israelis are fighting a non-

army. It's like me killing a dog that can't even defend itself. It's not the same firepower, it's not the same balance as the Palestinians and that's horrific—stones against tanks and helicopters and guided missiles.

"[Acting Prime Minister] Gillard said that Hamas started everything and that it's responsible for these atrocities. It's ludicrous. She's saying that to please Israel. Honestly, between you and me, I don't like politics because of what happens to everyone. The one who gets hurt is actually the poor person. The politicians brainwash people to hate another people. That's unacceptable. In this country it's different to the mindset of Jewish and Palestinian. The politicians are urging Jewish people in Israel to hate the Palestinians."

Rawah Haouli attended the rally with her young daughter Sandas. "It's quite horrifying to think that in these times we still have this going on," she said. "I've been seeing a lot of the footage on Al Jazeera. It's quite depressing as a mother having children, seeing people dying, these innocent people. They claim it's Hamas but I can see they're just civilians, ordinary people. It's just very disturbing. I haven't got family or friends in Gaza but I've got lots of Palestinian friends here in Australia.

"I think what's going to happen next is what always normally happens. The conflict gets a lot of media attention, then Israel says it's going to slow down, it backs up a little bit, and then when it's quiet again they'll continue striking.

"In 2006 I joined the rallies and the protests against the Israeli offensive in Lebanon. I thought that because we're doing something it will make a change, but unfortunately not much is done, and the Australian government doesn't say that it stands by Lebanon or the Palestinians. Politics continues the way it's normally run. We thought because we voted the Labor Party into government that we would have a change compared to the Howard government, but unfortunately it seems to always be the case with Israel and the Middle East that the Arabs and the Palestinians are seen as the aggressors and the others are just protecting themselves. The Palestinian people get caught in the middle."



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