

# Thousands march through New York City as Israel invades Gaza

A reporting team  
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Thousands of people demonstrated in New York City Saturday, just as Israeli forces launched their ground assault on Gaza after a week of aerial bombardment that claimed the lives of nearly 500 and left more than 2,000 wounded.

The protest was the largest of a number of demonstrations that have taken place across the US in recent days. These have included a march of thousands outside the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C., as well as a vigil held by dozens at the entrance to President-elect Barack Obama's vacation home in Hawaii. Thousands also took to the streets in Los Angeles, and protests and rallies were organized in many other American cities.

Saturday's protest, held in bitterly cold weather, saw several thousand gather in New York's busy Times Square, filling up several blocks, before marching to the Israeli consulate on Manhattan's East Side.

Groups of Arab and Muslim families with young children, working people and students were joined by New Yorkers of all ages and nationalities, many of whom wore keffiyeh scarves in solidarity with besieged Gaza. Chanting "Free, free Palestine" and carrying signs that called for an end to the siege and to the killing of innocent civilians, the demonstrators attracted widespread support from passersby.

Many carried homemade signs opposing the Israeli attack. One read, "Give Israel the shoe"—referring to the shoes thrown by an Iraqi journalist at President Bush last month—another, "Genocide is not self-defense."

Others denounced Arab regimes, particularly Egypt, for their direct or tacit complicity in the bloodshed. "Axis of Dirt" read one sign showing Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud

Olmert

The demonstration reflected the growth and diversity in the Middle Eastern population in New York's greater metropolitan area. According to a report by the Center for Immigration Studies, California has the highest Middle Eastern population of any state, with more than 400,000. However, of states with the most Middle Eastern immigrants, New York has one of the fastest growing populations, after Virginia and Michigan (*WorldNet Daily*, January 4, 2009).

A report released by the Department of City Planning used the 2000 Census number to track languages spoken at home, illustrating the distribution of Arab-speaking New Yorkers by neighborhood. Brooklyn has by far the largest number of the five boroughs: approximately 24,000 of its 2 million residents are Arab speakers. They are overwhelmingly concentrated in the Bay Ridge area but reside in neighborhoods across the greater metropolitan area.

A small counter-demonstration assembled across Seventh Avenue at the start of Saturday's rally, with fewer than 50 people waving Israeli and US flags and carrying placards denouncing Hamas and supporting the Israeli assault on Gaza. Those participating in this Zionist rally were far outnumbered by Jewish demonstrators protesting against Israel's actions, some of whom carried signs with slogans such as "Another New York Jew against Israeli apartheid."

A WSWS reporting team distributed 700 leaflets of "The Gaza crisis and the perspective of permanent revolution" and spoke to demonstrators.

A group of students from Al-Ghazaly high school had traveled from Teaneck, New Jersey, to the rally with their teacher, Huweda.

With close family in the Gaza Strip, Huweda said she was not a supporter of Hamas, but that the recent Israeli

onslaught has outraged her. Asked who bore responsibility for the outbreak, she included the US as well as other Arab regimes.

"The people of all countries, in their hearts, are with the Palestinians, but their governments have other priorities. Even Jews are against this killing."

One of her students, a high school senior born in the US, felt there was no sign President-elect Barack Obama would be better than Bush. Whether or not Obama had been notified in advance by the Israeli government of the preparations to attack Gaza, "he doesn't need anyone to tell him what he could see on TV like anyone else," she said. "No matter what, he should say to stop killing children. But he hasn't said this."

Yussuf, a Muslim of African descent, came with his wife to the rally from Brooklyn. Carrying a hand-made sign that said, "This is not warfare, it is genocide," he expressed some hope that Obama would be more fair-minded, but added that "the US is pro-Israel no matter what, and Obama will need to keep the status quo."

Chris, a young man who works at the United Nations, said he was born in the US, but he maintained close ties to the Middle East and his family in Syria.

"I am not a nationalist. Pan-Arabism is dead, and religion is used as a tool politically. People are really just one heterogeneous group, but it is the people with power that bear responsibility for these conflicts, which go back to the legacy of World War I and the nation-states created by the British."

Asked how he thought the attacks on Gaza could be stopped, he said they could be ended quite simply.

"Give the Palestinian people land, food, decent homes, free access to jobs and infrastructure, and you'll have peace," he said. "The Middle East is actually a very wealthy area that could be stable and prosperous for all." He agreed that the same could be said about the US, where it is social inequality under capitalism that is at the root of the problem.

The demonstrators began to move toward the Israeli Consulate, just as news of the Israeli ground assault was announced and appeared over the Times Square news monitor.

A woman who had come with her husband and another couple in their twenties said, "My husband's family live in the Gaza. We were able to speak to them. In the daytime, a bombing happened in their area. They

are scared. Their kids are terrified. The food and electricity is day-to-day. They are afraid there may not be food or electricity. Two days ago, there was some food in the market but not now. It will be more killing, heartache, people losing their kids. But it has been like this for years now. I do not think this demonstration will change it."



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