Sri Lankan journalists protest against Israeli war on Gaza

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Dozens of Sri Lankan journalists held a protest march in Colombo on Wednesday against Israel's genocidal war, backed by the US, against Palestinians in Gaza. The Colombo protest was called by the Sri Lanka Journalists for Global Justice (SLJGJ).

Outrage against Israel's invasion has intensified after Israeli forces bombed the Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza, killing at least 500 people including medical staff and patients.

The SLJGJ members had planned to march to the UN mission in Sri Lanka from the Palestine embassy located some two kilometers away. As journalists and activists gathered within the embassy, a large number of police, including the riot squad and water cannon were waiting outside to block them.

When the journalists started their march, police stopped them, declaring they could not allow the march. Soldiers had also been kept on standby. When organisers asked whether a court had issued an order, police arrogantly declared that a court order was not necessary and they had orders not to allow any march.

The blocking of the march is in line with the government's pro-Israel stand. President Ranil Wickremesinghe was among the first leaders to denounce Hamas' "unprecedented attack" on Israel and the "killing of large numbers of civilians" while remaining totally silent on Israel's bloody siege of Gaza.

Wickremesinghe has a notorious history of attacking democratic rights and is strengthening security forces in anticipation of a renewed popular upsurge against the government's scorched-earth IMF austerity policies.

Protesters reached the UN office by vehicle and handed over the SLJGJ appeal. In front of the UN office, they waved Palestinian flags and chanted slogans, including "Free Palestine." A banner demanded "End the occupation now," "Implement the US resolution on Palestine now," and "Create the Independent and Sovereign State of Palestine now." Other placards declared: "Bring the war criminals to justice" and "End Israel's Apartheid rule."

The SLJGJ appeal expressed "disappointment" at the UN's "failure to deescalate the tension and call for an immediate ceasefire…" It demanded the UN establish a mechanism to implement a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

This appeal to the UN—a body dominated by the imperialist powers—is futile. The US and its allies have thrown their full support behind Israel's murderous assault on the Palestinian people that is threatening a wider war in the Middle East. It is to the international working class that those outraged by Israel's action need to turn for support.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to a number of the protesters and also to workers and youth about Israel's war on the Palestinian people.

Ameen Izzadeen, general secretary of the SLJGJ, said the organisation was formed "not only for the rights of Palestinian people, but wherever oppression takes place, wherever persecution takes place… Genocide is taking place in Gaza and ethnic cleansing is taking place in Gaza; land grabbing is taking place in Gaza. Colonialism is being established as the very norm of the United Nations… Unfortunately, Western countries, the US, UK, they have taken the side of the oppressor rather than the oppressed.

"We need to raise our voice. People will understand the Palestinian side of the issue. Palestinians are the victims. Some people think that Palestinians are terrorists. They are not. You cannot call resistance terrorism. Calling resistance terrorism is itself terrorism."

Minaza, a freelance journalist, said: "Some people would see this as a Muslim issue. I find it is problematic. Also, some people show this as a war or conflict when it is actually [Israel carrying out] outright genocide. Truly, if you are supporting Israel, you are anti-humanity, you are pro-apartheid, pro-baby-killing, pro-massacre… and that is disgusting."

Ummul Mustafa, a social worker, condemned police for intervening to stop the march. "What our government is doing here is unfair. We all gathered here peacefully… but they [police] are not allowing [us to march].

"What is happening in Gaza cannot be expressed in words. What happened yesterday to a hospital in Gaza. It was bombed and about 500 people were killed! This is really disheartening... There in Gaza people are suffering. Israel bombings must be stopped. There is no reason to bomb innocent people... I am also not accepting what has happened to Israeli people.

"Palestinians are not occupying someone else's lands; they live in their own land. You just go back to the history which shows those lands belonged to Palestinians. Others are just trying to acquire that land... You can't allow them to massacre the Palestinian people silently. We have to raise our voice. It is everyone's duty."

Ashik, an unemployed youth, said: "I have heard and seen through television and YouTube videos of the looming tragedy inside Gaza. This is terrible. I have heard medical drugs that can be used for a month during normal times, now being finished because of a large number of patients. There is no place for Palestinian people whose homes have been destroyed by Israel's bombardment to live.

"Today, a group of Muslim people went to the UN regional office to hand over a letter demanding a ceasefire. But I am not sure that it is going to work as Israel has been carrying out this violence against Palestinian people for decades. Appealing to the leading countries is also useless. Only working people inside Israel and other parts of the world can effectively end this disaster."

Chaturanga, a health worker, told the WSWS: "I was shocked to watch the humanitarian crisis inside Gaza. Nobody wants to see such crimes. I was particularly shocked when Israel forces attacked a hospital… The bombardment of hospitals is a war crime and I wonder why world governments still support Israel to carry out such crimes."

He recalled the protracted communal war in Sri Lanka against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam which resulted in the killing of more than one hundred thousand people. "We have had the terrible experience of war here in Sri Lanka and we have witnessed endless sufferings. The Israeli war on Gaza is a thousand times more dangerous than the three-decade war in Sri Lanka. Over two million people in a tiny strip of strip that is encircled by the enemy state are completely desperate… This [war] should be stopped immediately."

Herath, a nurse, said: "In my opinion all wars should be stopped. Wars always are disastrous and killing millions of people. I saw a number of YouTube videos of shocking stories inside Gaza. In this Israeli attack on Gaza, we see the disaster with our own eyes. Children and women are mostly suffering. How can anybody imagine a situation without even basic necessities like water, medicine and electricity? I learnt that the hospital was being attacked. Nobody who is human should endorse such crimes."

Sumith, a retired railway worker, told the WSWS: "It is Hamas and Palestine people who have been victimised by Israel. For Hamas to engage with Israel is a life and death struggle. One can imagine how they have been under repression. Still, they keep on fighting even after a week, and to fight as such they must have undergone unjust treatment.

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