

Massive protests in Indonesia against Gaza genocide

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On November 5, an enormous rally was held at National Monument Square in Indonesia's capital Jakarta opposing Israel's genocidal war on the Palestinians in Gaza. The square, located near the United States embassy, was filled with hundreds of thousands of demonstrators. Rally organisers placed the attendance at over two million people.

As is the case worldwide, the fascistic policies of the Netanyahu government and its imperialist backers that led to the ongoing slaughter in Gaza are provoking widespread outrage in Indonesia, encompassing people of all ethnicities, religions and ages, but particularly among workers and youth.

The Jakarta rally, organised by the Indonesian Peoples Alliance to Defend Palestine, is the largest yet in the country, where demonstrations have taken place since Israel seized on the October 7 Palestinian mass uprising to launch its assault on the population of Gaza. The same day, demonstrations were also held in other cities throughout the archipelago, including Surabaya, where thousands rallied outside the US consulate.

Many of the protesters at the Jakarta rally came to the capital from various cities across Java by bus or motorcycle, some travelling great distances to participate. Protesters waved Palestinian flags and called for a ceasefire. People carried placards with such slogans as "Bombing kids is not self-defence!"

Conscious of the broad opposition that exists around the world to the genocide in Gaza, Sunday's massive protest has been met with a deafening silence in all the major Western media outlets. The ruling class fears that workers and youth will draw inspiration from the mass demonstrations in Indonesia, as well as from the tens of thousands who have protested in neighbouring Malaysia.

Mainstream media platforms in Southeast Asia that

did cover the event gave a vast undercounting of the rally's attendance. The *Jakarta Post* reported "thousands" while the *Strait Times* claimed "tens of thousands." Images and aerial video of the protest, widely circulated on social media, clearly showed otherwise.

Social media activity is playing a major role in the organisation of protests and sharing of video coverage, with the hashtag #IndonesiaBelaPalestina ("Indonesia defends Palestine") being used widely on Twitter.

In addition, where the protest has been reported, attention has been focused on Indonesia's status as the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, with a population of 279 million people. However, as interviews with participants indicate, the protests in Indonesia are not being fueled by religion but by disgust toward Israel's genocide against the Palestinians.

At the Sunday rally, teachers Endro Sasongko and Maelani Kusuma told reporters from the *Straits Times*: "It's not about religion, it's about humanity." Another protester, Nunung Normawati, aged 61, made similar remarks: "You don't have to be a Muslim to support Palestine, but just be a human, a human with a heart."

Berlian Idriansyah Idris, 46, a cardiologist, spoke to *Arab News* about the images he had seen online of wounded Palestinian children and the devastating impact of Israel's relentless bombing. "We are still humans with conscience," he said. "We condemn Israel's atrocities, we support Palestine, and we demand an immediate ceasefire."

The rally was largely composed of young people, according to local media. Sumayah, 26, a social media content creator attending the rally with her parents, said: "I want to come in person, and not just post on social media, to show I stand with the Palestinians. I

have so many emotions right now—sad and angry at the senseless cruelty.”

Protests have been held repeatedly over the past weeks in Jakarta outside the US embassy, gathering thousands of people and growing in size. Demonstrators have denounced Israel, with which Jakarta has no formal diplomatic relations, as the “real terrorist” in the current war.

Another significant factor no doubt animates protest participants. Indonesia suffered as a Dutch colony from the 17th century until the mid-20th century, while also facing the predatory interests of other imperialist powers in the region.

Indonesia also became the site of one of the most brutal imperialist crimes of the 20th century: the mass murder of up to one million workers, peasants and members of the Indonesian Communist Party that took place as a result of the 1965-1966 CIA-backed military coup headed by General Suharto. Workers and young people now participating in the pro-Palestinian demonstrations are drawing connections between the horrific crimes of the past and those taking place today.

The Indonesian ruling class is clearly concerned that the mass support demonstrated for the Palestinians will end up cutting across its political interests domestically. Expressing this, in the lead-up to last Sunday’s demonstration, Indonesia’s anti-terror police issued a public warning against taking part in the rally, the *Straits Times* reported.

Unable to stop it, government figures then took part in the demonstration, attempting to channel the broad anti-war sentiment into harmless channels.

Speakers included leading members of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), one of the event’s coordinators, an organisation comprised of Muslim groups such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. The organisation is attempting to put forward religion as the basis of support for Palestinians, obfuscating the role of capitalism and imperialism in the barbarism. Former MUI leader Ma’ruf Amin is currently Indonesia’s vice president.

Several government ministers attended, including Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi and House of Representatives Chair Puan Maharani. Also present was former Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan, a candidate in the upcoming 2024 presidential elections. Anies was the only candidate to accept an invitation to

participate.

Labour groups connected with bourgeois politics have organised some demonstrations, gathering in front of the US embassy. They have called on the Biden administration in the US to not send troops to Israel and denounced US imperialism’s support for Israel’s genocide. The Confederation of Indonesian Trade Unions (KPSI) and the Labour Party organised additional actions, including marching to the United Nations offices. Heavy police presences were reported at these rallies.

The KSPI, however, is intent on diverting workers away from the anti-war struggle. It is planning to stage indefinite workers’ protests in cities across Indonesia, starting this week. They are centred on demanding a 15 percent minimum wage increase, not on Israel’s genocide. Union leaders have announced upcoming demonstrations in Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Pasuruan, Surabaya, Medan and Makassar.

In these protests, workers need to link their struggle against the government, the employers and the cost of living with the fight against the US-backed Israeli mass murder. They should take up the call of the Palestinian trade unions for industrial action to stop the shipment of military weapons to Israel or any country that backs the genocide.

Protesters in Indonesia’s growing mass demonstrations need to make a conscious turn to the international working class and fight for a global mobilisation, as the only way to end the imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza.



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