

Thousands rally in Israel demanding Netanyahu's resignation as government seeks to crush dissent

Jean Shaoul
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Thousands of Israelis took part in rallies across the country on Saturday evening demanding the government secure the immediate release of the hostages held in the Gaza Strip. Demands for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's resignation were widespread.

The main rally took place in Tel Aviv, with demonstrators marching to the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) headquarters in the city. People lambasting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government for doing nothing to secure the hostages' release, barely mentioning them in the five weeks since October 7.

Noam Perry, whose 79-year-old father was seized by Hamas on October 7, said of the government, "Do not talk to me about conquering, do not talk to me about flattening [Gaza]. Do not talk at all. Just take action... bring them home now." Another said, "They can't tell us, 'trust us,' but that sentence has had no meaning since October 7."

Demonstrators in Caesarea, where Netanyahu has his home, demanded his resignation. In Jerusalem, around 1,000 people took part in a silent demonstration in support of the hostages. Demonstrators in the mixed Arab and Jewish city of Haifa called for a new government, saying they refused to wait for the war to end. A convoy then drove down to join the demonstration in Caesarea. Other rallies took place in Beer Sheva and Eilat.

The demonstrations, while small and still reflecting a Zionist opposition to the Netanyahu government, express growing concerns about the purpose and direction of the war that threatens to escalate across the region, putting the survival of the State of Israel at risk.

Thirty-five Israeli Jewish and Arab peace and human rights groups have issued an open letter calling on the government to work for a ceasefire, the release of the hostages and a political and diplomatic solution to the

conflict. They said, "It is evident that there is no military solution to this conflict, nor can there ever be one. The only way to stop the bloodshed is a political agreement that will guarantee security, justice, and freedom for both nations."

The groups include Machsom Watch, Rabbis for Human Rights, the Parents Circle Family Forum, Women in Black, Yesh Gvul, the Arava Institute for Environmental studies and the Jewish-Arab political party Hadash. They called on the government to immediately "promote a broad prisoner deal, stop harming innocent civilians, act to curb the rampant settler violence in the West Bank and stop the persecution and oppression of Palestinian citizens of Israel and of those who express solidarity with the residents of Gaza and oppose the war."

They added, "Harming innocents on one side does not balance the pain of the killing on the other side, it just adds more pain," and, "There are no winners in war. Only peace will bring security."

An open letter from a group of Israelis, "We deserve the truth about October 7", published on *Mondoweiss*, states, "As Israelis we demand an official commission into the events of October 7. Genocide is being perpetrated in Gaza in the name of Israeli victims and we still do not know who was killed, how they were killed, and who killed them. We demand answers and so should you."

It draws parallels between the government's domestic and international rhetoric and Nazi propaganda. The authors say that the government is carrying out genocide "in the name of Israeli victims of the October 7 attack even though bereaved families are strongly opposed to this vengeful atrocity." They note that Israel's bombardment has—according to Hamas—already killed 50 hostages. Yet the government has not published a complete list of the victims or explained how they were

killed or by whom, referring to claims that some had been killed by Israeli security forces in the fighting against the attackers.

That the writers have not published their names for fear of reprisals testifies to the wall-to-wall propaganda and intimidation carried out by the Israeli government and its servile media, including the liberal *Ha'aretz*. There is virtually no reporting, nor pictures or film, of the horrific slaughter in Gaza that has killed more than 11,000 Palestinians, the majority of whom are children, women and elderly, and buried many more under the rubble. Instead, the media focuses endlessly on the grief and suffering of the families of those killed, injured and made homeless by the October 7 attack, even though cabinet ministers have yet to visit the grieving relatives or the southern towns and villages for fear of an angry response while they talk about fighting “human animals,” “a second Nakba,” and “flattening”, nuking and ethnically cleansing Gaza.

The Netanyahu government has launched a McCarthyite campaign, cracking down on freedom of expression and all dissent and opposition to the war and vilifying those reaching out to the Palestinians or calling for a ceasefire as traitors, “terrorist supporters” and “the enemies within.” It recently introduced legislation making it a criminal offence just to watch material on social media that supports Hamas.

This crackdown on freedom of speech and the targeting of critics of Israel’s genocidal policies, long planned, flows inexorably from the government’s determination to establish a Jewish supremacist state from the Mediterranean to the Jordan river, and to grant itself dictatorial powers to do so that were the subject of the nine-month long protest movement.

The government has now set its sights on the foreign media, with the security cabinet debating emergency regulations allowing the government to close media outlets that “harm state security.” Qatar’s *Al-Jazeera* is currently the chief target.

Palestinian students and staff are facing a witch-hunt in the universities and colleges. Adalah, the Palestinian legal centre and human rights organisation, has reported more than 100 cases of students and teachers expelled or dismissed for their social media posts or even chats in private WhatsApp groups about Gaza.

There is harassment and intimidation in the healthcare system, where Palestinian Israelis make up 40 percent of the workforce, with a systematic campaign to expel doctors and health workers, including for things they had

written before the war. Israel’s corporatist healthcare unions and medical associations have done nothing to defend them.

The police and state prosecutor have announced more than 120 indictments and arrests of Israel’s Arab citizens for posts supposedly constituting incitement or support of terrorism and identifying with Hamas. It follows the establishment of a task force, led by National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, to monitor expressions of Palestinian “extremism.”

This is not restricted to Palestinian Israelis. Dr. Meir Baruchin, a 63-year-old Jewish history teacher who posts names and pictures of Palestinian civilians killed by the Israeli army in Gaza or the West Bank, was fired and later arrested and held on remand charged with “conspiring to treason” for opposing the army’s operations in Gaza. On Friday, a court in Jerusalem extended his remand for a further four days.

The police have banned any protests in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza, arresting several dozen anti-war demonstrators on public order offences. On Thursday, they arrested four former Arab Israeli legislators who had planned to hold a demonstration against the war, with a court ordering their remand for a further four days. Such rallies have been violently dispersed in Haifa, Jerusalem and Umm al-Fahm.

Right-wing extremists have been threatening left-wing activists, following the publishing of personal information about targeted individuals on social media. In one incident, a dozen of the followers of the late extreme-right Rabbi Meir Kahane attacked the ultra-Orthodox reporter and left-wing activist Israel Frey, verbally and physically, throwing firecrackers at his home and chasing after him when he fled. The police took no action.



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