

Australian health workers rally against Israel's genocide

Our reporters

23 November 2023

Hundreds of health workers in Sydney and Melbourne staged demonstrations Monday night, protesting Israel's genocidal assault on Palestine.

In violation of international law, hospitals have been targeted by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) for repeated bombardments. The World Health Organisation has recorded more than 330 attacks on health facilities in Gaza and the West Bank since October 7, leaving hundreds dead, including dozens of health workers.

Nurses, midwives, doctors and other health workers, horrified by these war crimes, have responded around the world, with numerous protests and other spontaneous actions. In almost every case, these have been organised in direct opposition to the official line of the unions and professional associations. Monday's events were no exception.

In Sydney, more than 100 health workers and students, along with family members and local residents, gathered outside Westmead Hospital for a candlelight vigil.

Taking place on World Children's Day, particular attention was drawn to the mass killing of at least 5,500 children in Gaza. The vigil concluded with a speaker reading out the names of hundreds of the murdered children. The magnitude of Israel's brutality was expressed in the fact that, while this recitation lasted some 20 minutes, the list represented only a small fraction of the deceased.

Amir, a medical student, attended the protest at Westmead:

In Melbourne, around 200 health workers rallied at an inner-city park before marching to the Royal Children's Hospital and then Royal Melbourne Hospital. The demonstration, called by Unionists for Palestine, was addressed by two doctors and other

health workers.

Dr Ola Aladassi, a medical scientist from Gaza, specialising in cervical cancer, denounced Israeli propaganda claims the hospitals were military shields.

"I worked in different labs and hospitals, especially the Children's Hospital over there, before moving to Australia. I have never seen or witnessed any kind of military resistance or act around the hospitals. Targeting hospitals, ambulances, health care facilities, schools and other civilian infrastructure is an act of terrorism and only implies the intention of committing mass murder and genocide."

She spoke movingly about calls from her friends and colleagues at the besieged Al-Shifa hospital: "I received many cries from my colleagues, who were there asking for help. They told me that 'Now you hear our voices, but we don't know what will happen to us after that.' How do you expect me to feel after that? I cry a lot because I feel helpless.

"We all saw on the TV and the media how the newborns suffered from the lack of oxygen and electricity for incubators in this hospital. And most of them died because of that. And in addition to that were the sick and injured who were exposed to medical problems because of this shortage. Under what international law does this happen? Where is the humanity? Where are international laws to protect hospitals and medical staff?"

She received applause when she said she was wearing her lab coat from Gaza. "I am wearing it today to be with them." Her family is in Gaza and it had been 12 days since she had heard from them.

"When I talked to them, when I heard my mother and father, my dad's voice, this is giving me a lot of strength to keep going. But now I've lost all of this connection, but I'm still strong. For my people, I'm

still strong for my people.”

Numerous health workers from four nearby hospitals joined the rally straight from their shifts, many still in their uniforms.

Among these was Josh, a nurse:

Another was Seema, a doctor, who said: “It is not fair that people, the general public, should suffer when they have not done anything. They are innocent citizens and bombarding them with bombs, bullets and chemical weapons, which are being used but not announced. I disagree with it totally. I really am very, very disgusted, disappointed and depressed about the situation. I’m pretty sure all my professional colleagues agree that hospitals, schools, community centres where people are coming in for help, for refuge, should not be bombarded at all.”

She referred to the need for workers worldwide to take action to halt the supply of military materiel to Israel: “I think the transport of weapons should be stopped, because they are being used to kill people who can’t even defend themselves.

“Think about one child being killed every ten minutes. It just makes my heart cry, I can’t sleep sometimes, I can’t eat sometimes, I feel so sad. When I became a doctor, I took an oath to help humanity, not kill them.”

Asked about official pressure on medical workers not to comment on the genocide, Seema said: “We should be allowed to speak, we should be allowed to express our opinion. The more we do, the more we can convey the message to the authorities that what they are doing is wrong and they must be stopped.”

The largest union in Australia, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), and its state branch, the New South Wales Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA), had no official presence at either event.

The ANMF has been almost totally silent throughout the more than six-week onslaught. While voicing feeble support for a ceasefire, statements issued by the union do not even mention Israel’s repeated bombing of hospitals, and falsely equate the actions of oppressor and oppressed.

The ANMF’s statements say nothing about Labor, which, in line with the US and imperialist governments worldwide, is fully supporting Israel’s genocide. That is because the union’s function as the chief allies and

defenders of the big-business and pro-war Labor Party.

Health workers need to draw certain conclusions from the position of the ANMF and other health unions. An organisation that refuses to support the opposition of its members to genocide and the bombing of hospitals has no legitimate claim to represent workers on any issue.

This means workers need to form new organisations, rank-and-file committees, in hospitals, health care facilities and other workplaces. Through a network of such committees, workers across the country and around the world can take up the necessary political and industrial fight against the genocidal Israeli regime, and all of its imperialist accomplices, including the Labor government.



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