

# Widespread protests across the Pacific call for ceasefire in Gaza

John Braddock  
7 January 2024

Ongoing global protests over the Christmas-New Year period against the US-backed Israeli mass slaughter and ethnic cleansing in Gaza have again highlighted the isolation of ruling elites everywhere from the world's population. Alongside the million-strong protests in the world's capital cities, those in the remote Pacific islands testify to the vast international solidarity that has emerged.

Nic Maclellan, correspondent for the Fiji-based *Islands Business* magazine, last week posted on X (Twitter) a round-up of pro-Palestine activities in Fiji, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Cook Islands, New Caledonia, Micronesia, Saipan and Guam.

Protests took place in opposition to the pro-US/Israel positions of authoritarian island governments and powerful local churches. On 27 October, the UN General Assembly voted on a motion calling for an “immediate, durable and sustainable humanitarian truce” in Gaza. The resolution passed with 121 in favour versus just 14 against, including Israel and the US. Another 44 countries abstained and 14 did not vote at all.

The Pacific Islands had more opponents than any other region, with Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Tonga all voting against. Only the Solomon Islands voted in favour; the remaining Pacific Island states either abstained (Kiribati, Palau, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) or did not vote (Samoa).

The tiny Pacific states are facing escalating imperialist bullying as Washington and its local allies, Australia and New Zealand, ratchet up diplomatic, economic and military pressure to join region-wide US-led preparations for war with China.

Of those island states which lined up to support the No vote, Nauru, Marshall Islands and Micronesia are

impoverished micro-states. The latter two plus Palau, which abstained, function as subservient colonies of the United States in all but name under so-called Compacts of Free Association with Washington.

The two states with the region's largest populations that aligned with Washington and Tel Aviv—PNG and Fiji—occupy highly significant geo-strategic locations and have signed major security agreements with Washington and Canberra to counter China. Last September, PNG Prime Minister James Marape followed the US in moving the country's embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, funded by the Netanyahu government.

The developing protests in defence of the Palestinians, regardless of their relatively small size on the international stage, represent a determined stand by Pacific peoples against significant imperialist pressure exerted by local governments. The list of actions reported by Maclellan includes:

After **Fiji** condemned Hamas in the wake of 7 October and voted No in the UNGA resolution, citizen groups were soon calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to hostilities. Fiji's NGO Coalition on Human Rights sharply criticised the government of Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka (a former coup leader) in an “Open Letter in Solidarity with the Palestinian People” and other newspaper advertisements. Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and other groups have held regular “Thursday in Black” protests.

Following the significant blowback, some senior government ministers, including Rabuka's deputy prime minister and home affairs minister, opposed the No vote and Fiji switched its vote to Yes in the second UNGA resolution on 12 December.

**Samoa** did not vote on the first UNGA ceasefire

resolution. In response, a Samoans for Ceasefire group was formed, organising rallies and collecting signatures on a petition for an immediate ceasefire. After a campaign calling on the Samoan government “to use its influence and advocate for an immediate ceasefire in Palestine,” Samoa also switched to vote Yes in the second UNGA resolution.

In the **Cook Islands**, the Pacific Islands Forum summit last November which involved 18 member countries and observers from the US and elsewhere, saw locals rally outside the venue, calling on Pacific leaders to “condemn the killing of displaced Palestinians and God’s innocent children in Gaza.” Israel, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine have all lobbied for official Forum Dialogue Partner status, seeking to influence UNGA votes.

In **New Caledonia**, the USTKE trade union federation organised rallies in the capital Noumea calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and the occupied territories. Coinciding with a Pacific Defence Ministers’ meeting hosted by France in December, 1,500 protesters also marched to denounce the “remilitarisation” of New Caledonia by the French government.

In **Micronesia**, there are also calls for a ceasefire and an end to the massacre of women and children in the Occupied Territories and Gaza. Poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner wrote an opinion piece for the *Marshall Islands Journal*, criticising its UNGA vote against the ceasefire and arguing that “Marshall Islands needs to update its foreign policy on Israel and stand against genocide.”

A Marianas for Palestine group has called rallies on **Saipan**, urging leaders to call for protection of civilians and non-combatants in Gaza. “If there’s a war out there, it’s intimately connected to the way that the militarisation out here is happening,” the group noted.

In the US Pacific territory of **Guam**, which houses vast US military bases targeting China, local resident groups have rallied for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the Gaza blockade, an increase in humanitarian aid, and cessation of US funding for Israel’s war.

In **Papua New Guinea**, the government’s decision to shift the embassy to Jerusalem was criticised by the PNG opposition, civil society groups, as well as Palestinian Authority officials and Hamas.

Israel has for many years sought to build diplomatic, economic and religious influence among Pacific

nations in order to maintain a reliable voting base in the UN. Last August, *Jerusalem Post* opinion writer Avi Kumar declared that the “Pacific Island states have the best record of voting in staunch favour of Israel at the United Nations.”

This is buttressed by pressure wielded by the powerful churches. When the PNG embassy moved to Jerusalem, Marape used this to declare: “For us to call ourselves Christian, paying respect to God will not be complete without recognizing that Jerusalem is the universal capital of the people and the nation of Israel.” In the early stages of the war in Gaza, more than 600 religious pilgrims from the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga were stranded in Israel during the Feast of Tabernacles and later repatriated on special flights.

The unprecedented wave of protests in the Pacific are small in global terms and limited in scope, largely oriented to appeals to governments over the UNGA vote, which itself committed those countries voting in favour to nothing. Nevertheless, the emergence of broadening opposition to the genocide in Gaza is a significant development for impoverished and oppressed Pacific peoples, who are beginning to stand in opposition to war abroad and political and social oppression at home.



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