

New Zealand protests continue as government backs Gaza genocide

Our reporters
5 February 2024

Last weekend, for the 17th consecutive week, thousands joined protests across New Zealand against Israel's genocidal war on Gaza. They also denounced the National Party-led government's participation in the US-led bombing of Yemen—which is being done to stop Yemen's Houthi militants from disrupting shipments that are supplying Israel's war machine.

Last week, after nearly four months of bombing followed by a ground invasion, the World Health Organization stated that more than 100,000 people in the Gaza Strip were either dead, missing or injured. Hundreds of thousands more are malnourished, with many experiencing starvation, and perhaps three quarters of the population of 2.3 million have been displaced.

Rallies took place in more than a dozen cities and towns including Auckland, Christchurch, Hamilton, Dunedin, Palmerston North and Nelson. Most of these events were held without any media coverage. There is likewise a blackout on the mass protests taking place internationally, involving millions of people.

In Auckland, about 150 demonstrated outside the Britomart train station. According to one report, Pacific Islanders were prominent at the event, carrying flags from Tonga, West Papua and Fiji.

The protests were held ahead of New Zealand's February 6 national day, Waitangi Day. Many speeches drew parallels between the colonisation of New Zealand in the nineteenth century, which dispossessed indigenous Māori of their land, and the oppression and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by the Zionist state.

At the Dunedin event, attended by about 200 people, Palestinian refugee and activist Rinad Tamimi said: "Don't let them tell you that this is about religion, or about race, or about colour, or even about Hamas. It's always been about the land, it's always been about

greed and power."

She urged the protesters to keep fighting, stating: "We will not stop until Palestine is free. A ceasefire isn't enough; we need a cease-genocide, a cease-occupation, a cease-apartheid. We need justice for everyone, from the river to the sea."

Another Palestinian speaker, Dr Rula Talahma, pointed out that the Israel Defence Forces were now preparing an assault on Rafah, in the south of the Gaza Strip, where hundreds of thousands of people have fled from the destruction in the north. "We will lose more innocent people as Israel attacks the Rafah border crossing and no-one is there to stop yet another massacre," she said.

In the first three weeks of the war, Israeli forces killed 21 members of Dr Talahma's family, according to an article in the *New Zealand Herald* in November.

She listed the atrocities committed against people in both Gaza and the West Bank. "Indiscriminate attacks on civilians, refugee camps, places of worship, and UN facilities. Summary executions, destructions and desecrations of cemeteries, mosques, churches, cultural and historic sites, collective punishment, attacks and violations on all medical facilities, forced evacuations, use of white phosphorus on civilians, murdering people who surrendered, Israel's use of human shields, abuse and humiliation of detainees, targeting of journalists, and genocide."

The government has refused to condemn Israel and continues to describe its genocide as self-defence against Hamas. Six New Zealand troops have been sent to assist in bombing Yemen, as the US spreads war across the Middle East, targeting groups that are allied with Iran.

In addition, New Zealand has joined the US and about 10 other countries in stopping its funding to the

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) after allegations that a handful of people employed by the agency in Gaza joined the Hamas operation on October 7.

This criminal decision is aimed at assisting Israel's blockade and deliberate starvation of the population of Gaza. More than 150 UNRWA employees have been murdered by the Israeli regime, which has called for the agency to be abolished.

Speaking in parliament on January 31, Luxon falsely declared that a preliminary ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) had found that there "wasn't a plausible risk" that Israel was committing genocide.

The far-right ACT Party leader David Seymour, a minister in the coalition government, denounced what he called "the casual, lazy misuse of a word as important as 'genocide,'" which he claimed was not happening in Gaza.

Luxon was later forced to issue a correction, telling parliament that "the court found that there is a plausible case that Israel's conduct in Gaza may breach its obligations under the genocide convention."

The New Zealand media is also seeking to distort the facts in support of the Netanyahu regime. On January 28, Radio NZ, the state-owned broadcaster, falsely reported that the ICJ had found Israel "not guilty of genocide." After an outraged response from members of the public, Radio NZ published a correction, stating that "the court did not make a specific ruling on whether genocide had occurred, but said there was a plausible case against Israel under the 1948 Genocide Convention."

The "mistake" follows a pattern of downplaying Israel's atrocities. In an email to Radio NZ staff—leaked on February 2 and widely circulated on social media—the organisation's chief news officer Mark Stevens advised them to take "care" when using "contested definitions, for example around genocide" in reporting. On at least one occasion, the word "genocide" was censored from an interview with a New Zealand Palestinian activist.

The opposition Labour Party and the Greens, for their part, have spoken in support of the genocide case against Israel taken to the ICJ by South Africa. When it was still the government, however, until late November, Labour refused to condemn Israel's atrocities, instead legitimising and defending them.

The Greens and pseudo-left groups, which have been prominent at several of the Gaza rallies, promote illusions that pressure can be brought to bear on Labour and the National-led government to change course and take a stand against war and genocide.

This is completely false. The Luxon government is proceeding in lockstep behind Washington and Tel Aviv, and Labour would be doing the same if it had been returned to office.

National and Labour both support major increases to military spending—paid for with cuts to social spending—in order to take the country into what is developing into a Third World War, in the Middle East, against Russia, and against China. The Ardern Labour government sent more than a hundred NZ troops to Britain to help train Ukrainian conscripts for the US-NATO war with Russia.

Workers and youth who are joining the anti-war protests must adopt a socialist perspective, based on the understanding that New Zealand is a minor imperialist power, whose ruling class is determined to profit from the redivision of the world as part of the US-led alliance. It is not possible to fight against Israel's genocide without the struggle to unify the international working class in a revolutionary offensive aimed at abolishing capitalism, which is the source of war, fascism and colonial oppression, and to establish a socialist system on a world scale.



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