

Nakba anniversary in Sri Lanka—an expression of growing opposition to the Gaza genocide

Saman Gunadasa
20 May 2024

An “Anniversary of the Nakba” and “An Evening of Solidarity” with the Palestinian people was held at Colombo Public Library Auditorium in Sri Lanka on May 14, followed by special screenings the following day.

The 76th Nakba Day events in Colombo, which commemorated the original ethnic cleansing of 80 percent, or around 750,000 Palestinians from the newly founded state of Israel in 1948, was one of numerous protests, demonstrations and other events held around the world.

Nakba means catastrophe in Arabic and is used to describe the violent displacement and dispossession of the land, property and belongings of the Palestinian people, and the destruction of their multi-ethnic society and democratic rights by the Zionist Israeli state.

During the 1948 Nakba, over 500 Arab-majority towns and villages were depopulated with dozens of massacres. Some 78 percent of the total land area of Palestine was seized by Israel, with the backing of the UK, the US and other imperialist powers. These and other bloody atrocities targeting Palestinians have continued ever since, up to the current genocide in Gaza, which has killed over 35,000 Palestinians, the majority women and children.

According to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), over five million Palestinian refugees are presently scattered throughout the Middle East.

Around 250 people, including families with children, participated in the May 14 event in Colombo with over 150 attending the film festival the following day.

The “Evening of Solidarity” consisted of exhibitions, speeches and videos, along with poetry, songs and drama performed by Sri Lankan children and adults commemorating the Nakba and expressing solidarity with

Palestinians in Gaza. The events were organised by the newly formed “Free Palestine Movement” in Sri Lanka.

One of the highlights of the evening was the launch and free distribution of *Children of the Little Olive Park*, a children’s book by Sri Lankan playwright, screenwriter and theatre director Ruwanthie de Chickera.

As she explained to the media, “This is not exclusively a children’s book. However, I wrote it in such a way that even a child could understand how the conflict was created in Palestine, and how it has been stoked throughout the years to bring about the terrible situation we are now in.”

De Chickera’s book is a commendable effort and one that clearly and simply describes the stark reality of the ongoing persecution of the Palestinian people. It will encourage readers to further study the complex historical and geopolitical issues behind Israel’s Gaza genocide.

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site*, de Chickera said: “As a human it’s impossible to watch what is happening in Palestine and not want to respond. I think it is the responsibility of every human being to try and do whatever they can to stop what is happening [in Palestine]... I am using my tools as an artist.”

Asked to comment on the struggle being waged by the WSW and the International Committee for coordinated global action by the international working class to stop the genocide, she said: “I am a socialist... Capitalism is imploding and it’s destroying the world—it’s destroying all of us, it’s destroying itself.

“Yes, I believe in the working class. They are the cogs who run the machines of this world, but mobilising the working class has always been a challenge. It’s difficult, but I think this battle [to organise the working class], and what is happening right now, has to be fought on many, many different levels,” she said.

De Chickera's *Children of the Little Olive* performed later that evening by the Stages Theatre Group.

Another drama, titled *Shattered Dreams—Unbroken Spirits*, was presented by the members of the Iman Academy. The performance, which involved actors whose ages ranged from 10 to 16 years, reflected the anguish and horror felt by young people confronted with the current plight of Palestinians, particularly women and children.

Iman Academy drama director Rukshana Hassan told the WSWs that the drama was written entirely by the children involved in the performance. She said it was very difficult for children to deal with the struggles and the torture being inflicted against the Palestinians, which they saw on social media.

"They were feeling so helpless and so we basically needed to give them a platform, which they grabbed and embraced with their own words," Hassan said. The drama, she added, "was a somewhat fulfilling answer for the children and their feelings, and how to deal with questions such as, 'What can we do now? How can we help?'"

The next day the Colombo Palestine Film Festival screened two films—*Farha*, a drama, and *The Stones Cry Out*, a documentary—both about the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948.

Made in 2021, *Farha*, is a coming-of-age drama based on a true story about a 14-year-old rural Palestinian girl during the Nakba. Written and directed by Darin J. Sallam, the movie, which was Jordan's entry for the best foreign language category in the 2023 Oscars, has won several international awards.

Farha (Karam Taher), who dreams of studying in a city school and becoming a teacher, is rebelling against a traditional marriage proposal suggested by her father. Her life and dreams are turned upside when her village comes under attack from armed Zionists and their threats that everyone must leave the village or be killed.

She rejects an offer to leave in her friend's automobile and decides to stay with her father, who was the village headman. As the Zionist forces approach the village, her father locks her in a storage space under their house to protect her, and promises to return. He is captured, however, by the Israeli military and then used by these forces as a hooded identifier of the village fighters.

Farha's stay inside the dark storage space is nightmarish and she glimpses the brutality of the Zionists, including their cold-blooded murder of a Palestinian family and their children. The family's pregnant mother, who is murdered by the Zionists, gave birth a few minutes

before the Israeli soldiers arrive in the village. The film's concluding titles explain that Farha never met her father again but eventually made it to Syria, where she shared her story.

Israel's culture minister Hili Tropper publicly denounced the film in 2022, claiming it was full of "lies and libels" and a "disgrace" to screen it in Israeli cinemas. In fact, the murderous Israeli attacks on Palestinians in Gaza today are simply a continuation of the sort of horrors accurately dramatised in *Farha*.

The Stones Cry Out, the second film screened, is about Palestinian Christians, who have lived side by side with Muslims and Jews for almost two thousand years, an integral part of Palestine's multi-ethnic, multicultural society.

In 1948 they were among the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians driven from their land and village homes in the fertile hills and valleys of the Galilee by the Zionists' "Operation Broom." They were dispossessed to make way for settlers in the newly created state of Israel.

Israeli troops expelled all the residents of the Palestinian Christian village of Kafr Bir'im during the operation, telling them that they would be allowed to return. This never happened and in 1953 the village was destroyed by the Israeli Air Force. Some of the expelled villagers lived in Israel, others became refugees in Lebanon and neighbouring Arab countries. All that is left of the ancient rural settlement is the crumbling remains of the abandoned church and its bell tower.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact