

Palestinian-Australian activist issues defiant response to police preparation for arrest on bogus charges

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Hash Tayeh, a Palestinian-Australian businessman and anti-genocide activist, addressed the most recent Free Palestine rally in Melbourne last Sunday, defying a police investigation on bogus allegations of hate crimes under Victoria's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act.

Tayeh told the *World Socialist Web Site* that police informed him last Thursday that a warrant for his arrest has been issued, for allegedly "inciting serious contempt for Jews." His lawyer has negotiated a time later this week to hand himself in to the police.

The accusations of antisemitism and hate crimes are entirely fraudulent. Since the beginning of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, weekly demonstrations have been held in Melbourne as in other Australian cities, involving tens of thousands of people, including numerous Jewish-Australians who oppose the Zionist regime's genocide in Gaza.

Tayeh's arrest warrant is part of a wider campaign, spearheaded by the Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, to falsely conflate anti-Zionism with antisemitism in order to slander the Free Palestine demonstrators and prepare for violent police suppression of the movement.

Hash Tayeh spoke with the WSWS during last Sunday's demonstration, which featured a heavy police presence.

"They're just attempting to conflate Zionism and Judaism—but they are not one and the same—we have Jews who stand with us every week, here and all over the world," he explained. "And we have a lot of love and respect for our Jewish brothers and sisters. I'm just being used as someone to send a message to the greater public. It's not about me, it's about the movement, it's

about instilling fear in people that support Palestine.

"But it's not going to work. We're not intimidated, we're not going to back down. We are standing tall and proud and will continue to stand until Palestine is free."

Tayeh explained that police have raised with his lawyer the slogan "Zionism is terrorism." He said: "I genuinely believe that Zionism is terrorism. The belief that you can build a state on the dead bodies of men, women and children is terrorism. Everybody has their right to self-determination, but no one has a right to build a state on the dead bodies and displacement of millions of people."

Tayeh has had 38 family members killed by the Israeli military in Gaza in recent months, as well as two children that he sponsored for the last four years.

Asked about how he saw the role of US and Australian imperialism in supporting Israel and the genocide, he replied: "I don't think I need to say anything about the US—that's well known, their support for genocide and for murder is rooted throughout their entire system. From their lies about the Iraq war, to their lies about Afghanistan—they've destroyed entire populations.

"As for Albanese, he is a hypocrite. When he used to attend these rallies he once chanted the exact same thing that he now denounces—'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.' I think that Labor is doing an injustice and is caving in to the lobbying of influential individuals, whereas it should be standing for the people, the people coming out every week saying 'not in my name.'"

Tayeh issued a defiant speech outside the state parliament after around 5,000 demonstrators marched through central Melbourne.

He said: “In their desperation, the Zionists have made another mistake here in Australia; they have lobbied tirelessly to have me charged with inciting serious contempt for Jews. Their influence has succeeded; they accuse me of inciting contempt, yet it is we who stand up against antisemitism week after week.

“We voiced our love for our Jewish brothers and sisters, thanking them for standing with us. It is the Zionist community, which includes individuals from different faiths, which ostracise Jews who do not support their murderous, genocidal ways. In their attempt to equate Judaism with Zionism, they have chosen the wrong person to test this precedent on. I will not be intimidated nor will I back down....

“Judaism and Zionism are not the same. Judaism is a rich, ancient faith embodying values such as peace, justice and compassion. Zionism, on the other hand, is a political ideology rooted in colonialism and dispossession. To conflate the two is not only misleading but dangerous, as it undermines the true essence of Judaism and alienates those Jews who oppose Zionism.

“By pushing for my arrest, the Zionists have opened a can of worms, if I am charged, the ensuing crime will provide a platform to expose Zionism. A platform to expose its beliefs, aims and crimes to the greater public.

“In Palestine, every act of violence breeds new waves of resistance. Similarly, in Australia and around the world, every attempt to defame and destroy us only strengthens support for the Palestinian cause. Thanks to their miscalculations and their desperate attempts to silence us, the liberation of Palestine is inevitable.”



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