

# Australian Labor government detains refugee from Gaza, threatens deportation

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In a brutal attack, the federal Labor government yesterday ordered the detention of Maha Almassri, a 62-year-old Palestinian refugee who fled Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza last year. Almassri has had her visa revoked and faces the prospect either of deportation to an active war zone, where Palestinians are massacred everyday, or of indefinite imprisonment in Australia.

The treatment of Almassri is one expression of Labor's complicity and involvement in the massive Israeli war crimes. As it has supported Israel politically, diplomatically and materially throughout some of the worst atrocities since the Holocaust, Labor is persecuting Palestinians within Australia, as part of a broader onslaught on mass popular opposition.

Without the slightest grounds, Almassri, a grandmother, has been treated as a criminal or a terrorist. Her house, where she lives with a relative in the working-class Sydney suburb of Punchbowl, was raided by police, including federal agents, around 5 a.m. yesterday morning.

Her brother Soliman told the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) the "family thought IDF [Israel Defense Forces] was at her door."

"They just came like a bunch of police officers and some federal police, and they just stormed the house, and they had a search warrant, and they terrorised everyone inside the house," Soliman stated. He asked: "What, [threat] is a 62-year-old lady to the Australian public?"

Almassri reportedly left Gaza via Rafah in February 2024. That means she lived through more than three months of an active genocide, when the IDF was carrying out relentless bombings throughout Gaza, targeting all residential buildings and civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals.

Almassri would already have endured over six decades of Israeli oppression, including Israel's crippling 16-year siege before the genocide began, during which Gaza was described by international rights' organisations as the world's largest open air prison.

Having survived what must have been years and decades

of trauma, Almassri is once again enduring state persecution.

After the raid, Almassri and her relatives were informed that her visa had been cancelled on the basis of an adverse finding by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). The domestic spy agency had declared that Almassri was "directly or indirectly a risk to security" and therefore "fails the character test" to remain a visa holder.

Such findings by ASIO are virtually unchallengeable. On the basis of "national security" provisions, the agency never provides the supposed evidence upon which it determines someone to be a security risk.

After being taken to Bankstown Police Station, Almassri was very rapidly transferred to the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre, where refugees and migrants who fall foul of Australia's draconian "border protection" regime are imprisoned.

The detention of Almassri was orchestrated at the highest levels of the Labor government. A document seen by SBS stated that the revocation of her visa was "personally" approved by Julian Hill, Labor's assistant minister for citizenship.

When Labor was in opposition prior to the 2022 election, Hill postured as a "left," including making limited statements condemning the persecution of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange. He was and is a close factional ally of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, who has repeatedly rewarded him with ministerial positions.

The likelihood of Albanese's direct involvement in the attack on Almassri was further indicated today. Asked by a journalist about the raid and her detention, Albanese responded that he had received a briefing on it, but would not comment further because "we don't talk about national security issues."

The timing of the raid was significant. It occurred amid a major escalation of the bogus campaign to conflate all opposition to the Israeli war crimes with antisemitism, which is being spearheaded by Labor.

Just hours after Almassri was raided, Albanese and Tony Burke held a press conference alongside Jillian Segal, their

“Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism.” Burke is the Home Affairs minister, overseeing the operations of the Australian Federal Police and ASIO, i.e., the forces that targeted Almassri. Punchbowl, where Almassri lived, is in the centre of Burke’s own electorate and is where his office is located.

Albanese and Burke fraudulently claimed that Australia was in the grips of a massive wave of antisemitism, as did Segal. She then outlined the contents of a report she has issued, demanding a police-state crackdown on pro-Palestinian sentiment in every conceivable area of civil society, from the universities, to the schools, artistic institutions, the media and more.

Significantly, Segal also insisted that there would need to be a tightening around the granting of visas. Segal is a former Zionist lobbyist, who explicitly defended Israel’s bombing of hospitals in Gaza prior to her appointment as the envoy, and continuously deems criticism of the Israeli state to be antisemitism.

The official press, which has whitewashed the genocide and slandered mass opposition, has hailed Segal’s plan. But even some of those promoting it have noted that it would likely criminalise Palestinians.

In a filthy article lauding Segal’s supposed crusade against “hate,” chief reporter at the *Age* Chip Le Grande parenthetically commented that “no Arab person who has grown up under Israeli occupation in the West Bank or Gaza could reasonably hope to pass the Segal test for Australian residency.” That is, this purported fight against racism, based on lies, entails the systematic denial of basic human rights to an entire people, and one that is being subjected to vast crimes.

The release of Segal’s report and the detention of Almassri are a warning that the Labor government is preparing a new stage of state repression, similar to that being implemented by openly far-right and fascist governments such as that of US President Donald Trump.

But this is a continuation of a lengthy record. As SBS noted, “in August 2024, Amnesty International accused Australia of the ‘rejection of over 7,000 Palestinians fleeing Israel’s relentless assault on Gaza.’”

“At that time, Mohamed Duar, Amnesty International Australia’s Occupied Palestinian Territory spokesperson, said: ‘The Department of Home Affairs has imposed severe restrictions on visa issuance for Palestinians fleeing the devastation in Gaza and cancelling visas on the grounds of perceived ‘security risks.’”

Hamas is proscribed as a “terrorist” organisation in Australia. Given that it ruled Gaza for almost 20 years, any involvement with government or civil society institutions could be the basis for an “adverse” security finding against a

Palestinian refugee. So could declaring that Palestinians have a right to carry out armed resistance against the illegal Israeli occupation and invasion of Gaza.

Hezbollah, one of the largest political parties in Lebanon, is also proscribed. Late last year, when Israel was illegally bombing Lebanon and assassinated Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah, the Labor government and its security agencies targeted protesters who had carried flags associated with that political movement.

Meanwhile, Australians and Israelis directly implicated in the genocide appear to be able to enter and leave the country at will, without the slightest hindrance. Media reports last year indicated that as many as 1,000 Australians are serving in the IDF as part of the onslaught on Gaza.

In February 2024, the virulently Zionist *Australian Jewish News* published an anonymous account of one such individual under the frothing headline “A warrior’s commitment to country,” the country being Israel. The man reported that he had participated in “some of the most intense battles in Gaza,” and had even been on a small elite team that provided security for Israeli prime minister and arch-war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu, when he had entered Gaza.

The “warrior” boasted of his record of “eliminating and arresting multiple Hamas terrorists.” IDF and Israeli government leaders have repeatedly deemed the entire population of Gaza, including women and children, to be Hamas. Having gone on his adventure, the “warrior” returned to a more prosaic life, running a business from Sydney’s affluent Eastern Suburbs.

The grotesque double standard is just one expression of Labor’s criminal complicity in the genocide.

All defenders of democratic rights must demand the immediate and unconditional freedom of Almassri. There should be a campaign for her liberation throughout the working class, including in the southwest suburbs of Sydney, where there is a massive Middle Eastern community. Such a campaign should extend into the factories and workplaces, including with preparations for strikes and industrial action. This fight is a key component of the broader struggle against increasing authoritarianism, genocide and imperialist war.



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