

Sri Lankan government fails to condemn Israel's planned seizure of Gaza

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Sri Lanka's Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government has issued a hypocritical and cowardly statement expressing mere "deep concern" over Israel's planned seizure of Gaza—following nearly two years of genocidal war against Palestinians.

Israel's security cabinet has approved plans for the full occupation of Gaza City and the forced displacement of its 2 million residents—plans that amount to mass ethnic cleansing.

Israeli and US officials, including Donald Trump, have openly discussed resettling Palestinians in neighbouring countries. The ongoing genocide includes mass killings, destruction of civilian infrastructure, forced displacements, and the use of starvation as a weapon. Tens of thousands—mostly civilians—have been killed, and many more displaced multiple times.

President Disanayake's government stopped short of any criticism, let alone condemnation, of Israel's plans which are fully backed by the US and other imperialist powers.

On August 9, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment, and Tourism released a brief three-sentence statement expressing "deep concern over the decision by Israel to seize the control of Gaza." It called for an "immediate ceasefire" and diplomatic dialogue to establish "sustainable peace."

Notably absent from the statement is any mention of genocide or the ethnic cleansing accompanying the planned takeover of the territory. Its empty calls for a "ceasefire," "dialogue" and "sustainable peace in the region," amounts to asking a serial killer to show mercy, effectively aligning itself with Netanyahu's far-right regime.

Far from seeking peace, Israel and its US backers pursue a "Greater Israel" agenda, targeting all

Palestinian territories and even parts of neighbouring states. Israel has attacked Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Since October 2023, more than 62,000 Palestinians—mostly children, women, and the elderly—have been killed. With over 90 percent of the population displaced and Gaza in ruins, famine and even graver war crimes now loom.

The JVP/NPP statement avoids any mention of the "Palestinian people." It remains silent on the dehumanising language of Israeli leaders such as Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's who has referred to Palestinians as "human animals." This silence marks a stark contrast to the JVP's earlier opposition to Israeli aggression.

On May 16, 2018, the JVP "condemned the brutal attack on Palestinian people" during the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem. Again, on October 31, 2023, JVP national organiser Bimal Ratnayake urged Israel to "stop its attacks" and agree to a ceasefire.

After coming to power in late 2024, however, the JVP, shifted its position to one of tacit alignment with the US-Israel war drive in Gaza and the geo-strategic agenda in the Middle East.

Ratnayake, who is now minister of transport, highways, ports and civil aviation and leader of the House, remains Chairman of the Sri Lanka Committee for Solidarity with Palestine—further underscoring the government's hypocrisy.

In line with its pro-Israel orientation, the JVP/NPP government has permitted visits by Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) personnel. While the number of IDF members currently in Sri Lanka remains undisclosed, one high-profile case involved Gal Ferenbook, an IDF soldier accused of war crimes in Gaza. After the Hind Rajab Foundation revealed his presence in Colombo last December, Ferenbook fled the country. The

foundation had appealed to Sri Lankan authorities, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and Interpol for his arrest.

The JVP/NPP government's orientation continues the policy of the previous Wickremesinghe government, which deployed Sri Lankan Navy ships to the Red Sea to support US-led operations against Houthi rebels in Yemen. In July, the current cabinet approved ongoing maritime security missions to protect commercial shipping, maintaining the alignment with US interests in the region.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka continues to send workers to Israel, replacing Palestinian labourers blocked by the ongoing Gaza genocide. A Memorandum of Understanding signed earlier this year enables Sri Lankans to work in Israel's construction sector. Between 15,000 and 20,000 Sri Lankans are currently employed there. In March, Sri Lanka opened a new consulate to expand commercial ties in areas such as diamonds, jewellery, cinnamon and agriculture.

The JVP's alignment with Israel is consistent with its long-standing support for reactionary and communal politics. The party backed Sri Lanka's nearly three-decade war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which ended with the massacre of tens of thousands of Tamil civilians in May 2009. Its support for Israel's war on Gaza mirrors these positions.

The Dissanayake government's cowardly statement on Israeli plans for the military occupation of Gaza, was in line with its response to the unprovoked and illegal US-Israeli assault on Iran. On June 23, following US airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, the government issued a weak, noncommittal statement, calling only for "de-escalation" and "dialogue," without mentioning the US or Israeli aggression.

Further deepening its pro-imperialist alignment, the JVP/NPP government has strengthened ties with Israel's key backers—Washington, London, and Berlin. After taking office, it continued the Wickremesinghe government's military cooperation with the US. Last October, Admiral Steve Koehler, commander of the US Pacific Fleet, visited Sri Lanka. In December, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Donald Lu, made a three-day visit as part of a broader regional push.

Like ruling elites elsewhere, the JVP/NPP fears the

rise of an anti-war movement among workers and youth—opposing not only the US-backed war in Gaza but also the escalating conflicts in Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific. The economic fallout from the Middle East war also threatens to further destabilise Sri Lanka and spark renewed mass protests.

Workers and youth in Sri Lanka must take up the fight to build a unified anti-war movement of the international working class—against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, NATO's war in Ukraine and US war preparations against China, that are all part of an unfolding world war.



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