

Israel announces official visit to South Pacific

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The Israeli Foreign Ministry announced last month an official “goodwill” visit to the South Pacific. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sharren Haskel will lead a delegation for discussions aimed at “deepening and advancing Israel-Pacific relations in a wide range of bilateral, multilateral, and strategic fields.”

The visit is a desperate diplomatic move to muster support in the face of international popular opposition to the Gaza genocide. The announcement coincided with a declaration by the UN-affiliated Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) that widespread famine, ruthlessly imposed by the Netanyahu government, has emerged in Gaza.

Haskel told the right-wing New Zealand podcast “The Platform” that the trip was planned for October, with visits focused on Israel’s “great friends” Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Fiji. Israel was also “grateful” for the NZ government’s “support” over the last two years, Haskel said, with discussions under way to include New Zealand—which will doubtless provoke substantial opposition.

The Israeli statement declared that the Pacific Islands “constitute an important focus of support.” It highlighted the establishment of embassies in Jerusalem, beginning with PNG in 2023, plus “significant backing of Israel within the United Nations” by the Pacific nations. It highlighted the role of Israel’s International Development Agency (MASHAV) in the Pacific and suggested that further aid would be forthcoming.

The visit is a calculated snub to Australia which, along with New Zealand, regards the Pacific as its own “backyard.” Australia’s Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has been sharply rebuked by Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu over his limited criticisms of the unfolding humanitarian disaster in Gaza, even though the Australian government continues to allow military exports to Israel.

The Israeli regime is aiming to mobilise support from Pacific states that have lined up with both Washington and Tel Aviv. Israel has for many years sought to build diplomatic, economic and religious influence among Pacific nations as a means of obtaining votes in the United Nations.

In October 2023, a UN General Assembly vote on a motion calling for an “immediate, durable and sustainable humanitarian truce” saw most governments seeking to head off the domestic public hostility to the genocidal assault on Palestinians by voting for, or abstaining, on the motion.

The vote was 120 in favour, 45 abstentions, and 14 against. Of 12 nations that followed the US and Israel in voting “no,” six were Pacific states. Four—Nauru, Palau, Marshall Islands and Micronesia—are impoverished micro-states, with the last three US colonies in all but name. The other two were PNG and Fiji—the largest and most significant Pacific Island nations.

Fiji’s Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka explained his country’s vote by falsely declaring: “Israel’s primary target is Hamas, not the Palestinian population... They have established safe zones to help Gazan citizens relocate out of harm’s way.” In February this year Rabuka was invited to deliver a prayer at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington after publicly backing US President Trump because of his support for Israel.

In September 2024, seven Pacific states opposed a non-binding UN resolution that demanded “Israel brings to an end without delay its unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory... within 12-months.” While the Solomon Islands and Marshall Islands voted in favour, Fiji, Nauru, the Federated States of Micronesia, PNG, Palau, Tuvalu and Tonga all voted against. The US, Australia, Samoa, Kiribati and Vanuatu were among 14 abstentions.

In June this year yet another toothless UN resolution

called for “an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in the war in Gaza.” It passed with 142 votes. Among the 12 nations that voted against, alongside Israel and the US, were Fiji, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, PNG and Tuvalu.

In September 2023, PNG’s Prime Minister James Marape inaugurated an embassy in West Jerusalem, only the fifth diplomatic mission in the city. Radio NZ (RNZ) reported that the embassy was bankrolled by Israel. In 2018 the US, in a flagrant provocation, moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, followed by Honduras, Guatemala and Kosovo.

Palestine’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the opening of the PNG embassy’s as “an aggression against the Palestinian people and their rights” and “a blatant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions.”

At the ceremony Marape said that Jerusalem was the “universal capital of the nation and people of Israel,” while remaining silent about Israel’s illegal occupation of East Jerusalem since 1967. Turning to Netanyahu, Marape cynically declared: “You have been the great custodian of the moral values that were passed for humanity.” He said that Israeli investors were welcome to land in a “special economic zone” in PNG and asked Israel to open an embassy in Port Moresby.

In February this year, Fiji’s cabinet announced it too would establish a consulate in Jerusalem. Rabuka, a former military coup leader, said he had received a phone call “from my friend Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu” expressing his gratitude. Rabuka took the opportunity “to express my deepest condolences for the tragic events of October 7, 2023, when Hamas attacked innocent lives in Israel.”

In an interview with the *Australian* in June, Rabuka defended Israel’s unprovoked and criminal military assault on Iran as an act of survival. “They cannot survive if there is a big threat capability within range of Israel. Whatever [Israel] are doing now can be seen as pre-emptive, knocking it out before it's fired on you,” he said.

Palestine’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned Fiji’s consulate, saying it violated international law and UN resolutions. Fiji’s move took place “at a time when the occupying power is escalating its attacks against Palestinians across all of the Palestinian Territory, attempting to displace them from their homeland,” it

stated.

The tiny Pacific states are facing escalating imperialist bullying as Washington ratchets up diplomatic, economic and military pressure to join region-wide US-led preparations for war with China. Marape and Rabuka have both signed far-reaching military and strategic agreements with the US, Australia and New Zealand.

There is, however, significant popular opposition to the deepening ties with both the US and Israel. PNG students staged repeated protests over the military agreement with Washington. Social media posts have condemned the PNG government for its opposition to a ceasefire in Gaza, accusing Marape of acting as a puppet.

Many ordinary Fijians have also expressed outrage at their government’s complicity in the Gaza genocide. Fiji’s Coalition on Human Rights last year sharply criticised the government in an “Open Letter in Solidarity with the Palestinian People” while the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement, Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre and other groups held regular protests.

Pro-Palestine actions have also taken place in Samoa, PNG, Cook Islands, New Caledonia, Micronesia, Saipan and Guam, all in opposition to the pro-US/Israel pressure of their authoritarian island governments and local churches. The emergence of broad opposition to the genocide in Gaza represents a significant political development among the impoverished and oppressed Pacific peoples.

The deepening famine in Gaza is producing large scale protests around the globe, including in Australia and New Zealand, against the humanitarian disaster carried out by Israel with the direct support of the US and backing of all the imperialist powers. The coming visit to the Pacific by representatives of the Israeli regime further underscores the vast gulf that separates the region’s ruling elites from the anti-war sentiments of the local population.



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