

# Anger in Australia over brutal treatment of Gaza flotilla activists

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Israel's brutal treatment of over 80 humanitarian activists, including eleven Australians, has prompted substantial anger and has, again, exposed the Australian Labor government's complicity in the crimes of the Zionist regime, as part of its broader support for US-led wars across the Middle East and globally.

As it has done repeatedly, Israel on Monday intercepted vessels from the Global Samud Flotilla, as they were en route to break the blockade of Gaza and deliver aid to its residents. The Flotilla vessels were captured in international waters, in an act of piracy, and the activists aboard were taken to Israel in what amounted to state kidnapping.

Footage and photos of the abuses suffered by the activists in Israel have gone viral. They were bound with zip wire ties and forced to kneel forward on the ground, in images that recall the US torture camp on Guantánamo Bay. Israel's national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir berated and taunted the activists, as he has previously.

Amid international anger, the activists were released Thursday, after three days in Israeli imprisonment. Once in Türkiye, Zack Schofield, an Australian climate activist, stated the cohort had been "treated really poorly" by Israeli authorities, including being forced to remain in hot areas without water.

Schofield said: "I have friends that were shocked with tasers, stun guns for extended periods of time just on entry to prison, were beaten, but it is nothing compared to what happens to Palestinians in the occupied territories every single day," the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported.

The activists stated that one member of the flotilla group, who was of Arabic appearance, had been taken away from the others and tortured, with his screams audible. Women had been degraded and sexually

assaulted.

The response of the Labor government was yet another exercise in cynicism and hypocrisy. Foreign Minister Penny Wong stated "We condemn the actions of Israeli Minister Ben-Gvir—who Australia has sanctioned—and the degrading actions of Israeli authorities towards those detained." Australia had made representations to the Israeli embassy along those lines, Wong claimed.

But Labor only issued those condemnations under conditions where the Israeli government itself had condemned Ben-Gvir. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the butcher of Gaza, who continues to evade an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, improbably described Ben-Gvir's actions as being contrary to Israel's "values."

Speaking on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "7:30" program, Israel's ambassador to Australia Hillel Newman declared that "The actions of Ben-Gvir himself have been condemned from wall-to-wall," within Israel including by its government.

Newman, however, defended the illegal interception of the flotilla and blithely denied reports of widespread abuse of the activists.

The various comments have the character of a charade. Ben-Gvir is a notorious fascist, who has been in a central leadership position in the Israeli regime throughout the genocide in Gaza, precisely because his bloodcurdling hostility to the Palestinians and anyone who defends them is the position of the Netanyahu government.

And Wong's statements of condemnation did not go beyond those of Netanyahu and other Israeli officials, and were every bit as worthless.

The public relations exercise recalls the response of

the Labor government when Australian citizen Zomi Frankcom and five of her World Central Kitchen colleagues were murdered in an Israeli drone strike while they were providing food to Palestinians in Gaza in April, 2024.

Wong and other Labor leaders expressed shock and anger, as though such criminal bombardments were not the continuous modus operandi of Israel's brutal war. Those statements did not alter Australia's fullthroated support for the genocide one iota, and Frankcom is now never mentioned.

The real attitude of the Labor government to the flotilla activists was demonstrated by an incident in Brisbane, the Queensland state capital, that has scarcely been reported by the media.

In a statement, Justice for Palestine Magan-djin (Brisbane) recounted that on Thursday morning, the mother of one of the detained activists Sam Watson, and supporters, had attended the office of federal Labor MP Julie Ann Campbell. They were seeking to speak to Campbell about the steps being taken by the government, if any, to secure Watson's release from Israeli detention where he then remained.

"Staff at MP Campbell's office ignored us for over an hour and called the police for 'protesters,'" the statement reported. Only when the supporters refused to be intimidated did the staff reluctantly agree that Campbell would call Watson's mother, a call that the group waited over two hours to eventuate.

That is not simply the response of a local parliamentarian and her office, but is fully in line with the program of the Labor government itself.

Labor has carried out massive attacks on democratic rights, targeting popular opposition to the genocide and anti-war sentiment more broadly. That included passing earlier this year far-reaching "hate speech" laws that potentially criminalise strident condemnations of Zionism and Israeli war crimes, and a bill providing unprecedented powers for the illegalisation of entire organisations and even political parties on the same vague and anti-democratic grounds.

In the states, particularly New South Wales, Labor administrations have led the charge against the pro-Palestinian movement, including with laws to restrict or even ban protests altogether. Those measures have been matched by the conservative government in Queensland, which passed laws criminalising pro-

Palestinian chants, including "From the river, to the sea," and is prosecuting activists under the legislation, threatening them with imprisonment of two years.

The issue is not simply a defence of the genocide. Labor's support for that historic crime, politically, diplomatically and materially, is one plank of its participation in the broader eruption of global war.

The Labor government was among the first in the world to support the utterly criminal US assault on Iran. While they feign shock at the deranged and fascistic actions of Ben-Gvir, the Labor leaders have said nothing to oppose Trump's threats to "annihilate" Iran and to return it to "the stone ages."

The continued genocide being unleashed on the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank and the people of Lebanon is quite literally never referred to by Wong, Albanese or any other member of the Labor government. Meanwhile, Labor has committed historic levels of funding to the military at the expense of government programs which are being gutted, in preparation for an imperialist war against China.

This militarist program is incompatible with democratic rights.



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