Pacific Islands Forum admits Israel as a dialogue partner

John Braddock
12 November 2026

The 18-member Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the Pacific region's main inter-governmental organisation, announced on October 21 that Israel had been admitted as a "partner" of the Forum.

The decision was initially made behind closed doors at the annual PIF Leaders' summit held in Palau in September. It followed a visit by Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar to Fiji in June, during which he met with PIF General Secretary Baron Waqa and presented Israel's request to join.

Forum chairman Surangel Whipps Jr., Palau's president and a close ally of Washington, justified the PIF's alignment with the murderous Netanyahu-led regime, telling media: "I think it's important for us to be able to engage as a partner because we have shared values of interest in climate impacts, building resilience and sustainability, and oceans." Whipps was speaking from the UAE where he was on a mission with Waqa lobbying for investment in the Pacific region's Resilience Facility.

The Forum has more than two dozen external dialogue partners, including the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France and the European Union. Its relations with Taiwan are maintained against strenuous objections from Beijing which insists it is in breach of the recognised "one-China" policy. Whipps—one of the region's most open anti-China hawks—invited Taiwan to participate in this year's summit, deliberately stoking tensions with China.

PIF dialogue partners have extensive diplomatic access to Pacific decision-making, including observer status at PIF summits where they have certain speaking rights. Israel will participate in the Forum's Sectoral Partnership Stream, actively involved on "development priorities." According to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the focus of its activity will include water management, desalination, agriculture and climate change adaptation.

The PIF is normalising relations with Israel in the face of popular revulsion and ongoing mass protests across the globe over the Gaza genocide. In alliance with the Trump administration the Israeli government is intensifying its rampage across the West Bank, escalating its criminal subjugation and ethnic cleansing of Gaza and consolidating its control of southern Lebanon in lockstep with the US-led war against Iran.

Israel's partnership status required consensus from all Forum members, including the local imperialist powers, Australia and New Zealand. The Australian government did not issue an official statement or formal commentary on the PIF announcement, but Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was part of the collective agreement while in Palau.

NZ's Foreign Minister Winston Peters declared that to criticise Israel's inclusion would be an "insult" to Pacific Island countries. Leader of the far-right ACT Party and NZ's Deputy Prime Minister David Seymour extended Israel "a warm Pacific welcome," claiming that "another democratic country" in the PIF was a "good thing."

In line with the opposition Labour Party's belated, hypocritical and limited criticisms of the Gaza genocide, foreign affairs spokesperson Vanushi Walters said if Labour was in government it would have opposed Israel's inclusion at the PIF.

The decision has met widespread opposition within the region, including by civil society and church groups. The Pacific Elders' Voice (PEV), a group of former Pacific prime ministers, presidents and senior diplomats, declared in a statement: "Given our principled positions on colonialism and human rights violations in the region, the PEV is perturbed with the

© World Socialist Web Site

Forum's recent partnership with Israel, the state which has committed genocide in Gaza, and has a long history of offending against UN resolutions and international law." The PEV called on the Forum to reverse its decision.

Israel's successful application for partnership status is an escalation of a diplomatic offensive designed to mobilise increased support from Pacific states that have lined up with both Washington and Tel Aviv. In an open show of embracing and legitimising the Zionist regime, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Fiji and Naoero (Nauru) all followed the Trump administration by opening embassies in Jerusalem. Samoa has plans to do the same. Israel in turn established a permanent diplomatic post in Fiji's capital Suva in June.

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. Fiji has repeatedly led half a dozen Pacific countries voting with Israel and the US against any resolutions, even non-binding, calling for a ceasefire or "humanitarian truce" in Gaza.

In September 2025, the UN General Assembly passed the New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine, with most Pacific countries choosing to either reject it or remain silent. The official vote saw 142 members in support, 10 against and 12 abstentions. Five Pacific countries joined Israel in opposition: Palau, PNG, Micronesia, Naoero and Tonga. Four, including Fiji, either abstained or did not register a vote

Israel's deputy minister of foreign affairs Sharren Haskel in October last year led a "goodwill visit" to the Southwest Pacific, aimed at "deepening and advancing Israel-Pacific relations"—in fact to shore up support in the face of escalating international popular opposition to the Gaza genocide. Haskel's trip focussed on Israel's "great friends" and "strategic partners"—PNG and Fiji—and included a stopover in New Zealand. Haskel said Israel was "grateful" for the NZ government's "support" over the previous two years.

The UN votes on Gaza, coupled with the provocative establishment of diplomatic posts in Jerusalem, reflect increasingly close ties with Washington amid the US-led campaign to minimise China's influence in the southwest Pacific. The 2026 Palau summit was dominated by intense pressure from the United States, Australia and New Zealand to issue a joint statement condemning a Chinese missile test conducted in the Pacific in July. A resolution passed but with no full consensus.

In order to mobilise popular support for their deepening alignment with Israel, right-wing establishment politicians are making increasingly desperate appeals to broad religious sentiment among Pacific Islanders. Defending the PIF deal with Israel, Fiji's Deputy Prime Minister Viliame Gavoka declared Israel's relationship with the Pacific was "biblical, ageless, real" and well beyond the "largely geopolitical."

In Samoa on October 31, the country's head of state Afioga Tui'malealiifano Vaaletoa Sualauvi II and Prime Minister La'aulialemalietoa (La'auli) Leuatea Schmidt led a parade in the capital Apia in support of Israel. Photos shared by the Samoan government showed participants carrying and wrapped in Israeli flags. According to the *Samoa Observer*, "Visibly emotional, La'aulialemalietoa linked his support for Israel to his Christian faith." La'auli is an authoritarian, Trump-like figure, currently embroiled in a major controversy over media restrictions.

There is significant popular opposition to the deepening ties with both the US and Israel. During the Apia visit in June by Israeli Foreign Minister Sa'ar, activists at the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) protested the Rabuka government's stance toward Israel. Pro-Palestine actions have taken place in Fiji, 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.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site