

The World Declares “Hands off Rafah!”

By Peoples Dispatch

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Over a hundred actions were held over the weekend to demand Israel back down from its threat to invade Rafah

Massive demonstrations were held over the weekend in cities across the world to protest against Israel’s threat to invade Rafah and to call for an immediate ceasefire. Over 100 protests took place on all continents as part of the “Hands off Rafah” global call to action which sought to increase pressure against Israel and its western backers who have shown no signs of letting up in their genocidal military campaign against Gaza despite mounting atrocities and nearly unanimous public opinion against Israel and its actions.

The call for the international day of protests was made by the Palestinian Youth Movement, the International Peoples’ Assembly, Progressive International, ALBA Movimientos, Pan Africanism Today, La Via Campesina, World March of Women – Latin America, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas, and the International League of People’s Struggle, among others.

Regarding the day of action, Irvin Jim, of the General Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa said, “Israel and the United States have been backed into a corner. Last week, foreign ministers from 26 of 27 EU member states declared their rejection of the ongoing genocide and warned Israel against going ahead with the invasion of Rafah. These cracks in the western imperialist bloc are a result of the organizing and mobilizing by people across the world. Now is the time to keep the pressure on, and remind Biden, Netanyahu, and all the other war criminals that their days are numbered.”

Cuba and Venezuela reaffirm revolutionary commitment to Palestine

Two of the largest mobilizations over the weekend took place in the capitals of Cuba and Venezuela, countries whose governments have a long history of expressing firm and material solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Since Israel began its war on Gaza, both countries have expressed their complete rejection of Israel’s actions, and have supported diplomatic efforts in the United Nations and other bodies to condemn Israel and call for a ceasefire.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel had issued a call for the Cuban people in all provinces to mobilise “in solidarity with our brother people and to condemn the holocaust that Israel seeks to provoke in Rafah. Everyone for Gaza!”

In the Cuban capital, Havana, thousands gathered at the Anti-Imperialist Tribunal led by the leaders of the Cuban Revolution to ratify their solidarity with the Palestinian people and condemn Israel’s genocide. The participants also expressed their condemnation of the role of US imperialism in aiding and supporting Israel’s genocide. The Tribunal is a plaza located directly in front of the US Embassy.

Díaz-Canel who was present at the mobilization wrote, “[The situation in] Palestine causes us profound pain. The impunity of those that bomb the people without mercy angers us. Today we have expressed the pain and indignation of the Cuban people in the Anti-Imperialist Tribunal.”

Chavista movements in Venezuela mobilised outside the Cuartel de la Montaña, the resting place of Hugo Chávez, in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas to demand an end to Israel’s genocide in Gaza and to stop Israel’s invasion of Rafah. The massive demonstration saw participation of several government ministers and leaders of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela including Chávez’s daughter, Maria Gabriela Chávez. The mobilization was led by the Alexis Vive Commune.

Venezuelan diplomat and Secretary of ALBA-TCP Jorge Arreaza addressed the Palestine solidarity action in Caracas. “The real people must be at the forefront in defending the Palestinian cause. It hurts us as if it were Venezuela,” he said in his speech.

Belly of the beast

In the United States, hundreds of thousands took to the streets in protests across dozens of US cities including Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, New Orleans, New York City, Portland, and Washington, DC.

The United States is the largest funder of Israeli genocide and since October 7, Biden has bypassed Congress several times to send weapons to the Zionist

state. However, increasingly, people in the country, especially young people, have been joining the global movement for Palestine and to pressure Biden to call for a ceasefire.

Peoples Dispatch spoke to Brian Becker, executive director of the ANSWER Coalition, on the ground at a march in New York City. “We’re witnessing a sea change in consciousness in the United States for the first time since the Nakba,” he said. “When people see masses of people like the demonstration today, 50,000 strong right in New York City in the pouring rain, when they see people coming together, that moves them, that creates new energy, that’s a lightbulb that goes on in people’s minds. So the consciousness is spreading because the struggle is spreading.”

The Global South speaks

Activists gathered in the Tunisian capital of Tunis to join the March 2 global day of action. Participants were from the progressive women’s group Egalite, the Union of Communist Youth, and the Workers Party of Tunisia.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, which much like Palestine is also living under illegal occupation, a march was called by Boricuas for Palestine, which other organizations took part in, including the Puerto Rican liberation organization Jornada: Se acabaron las Promesas. “Puerto Rico said *presente* and took to the streets of Old San Juan. We demand a permanent ceasefire, access to supplies in Gaza, stop the illegal invasion of Israeli settlers, return the lands of the Palestinian people, no more money and US bombs for Zionism, respect for human rights and the physical and moral integrity of the Palestinian people, stop the Palestinian holocaust,” the organization wrote.

Thousands mobilised in São Paulo, Brazil, in the Oswaldo Cruz Plaza on the Avenida Paulista. Political leaders such as state deputy Eduardo Suplicy, one of the founders of Lula’s Workers’ Party, joined the march.

In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the Socialist Party of Malaysia joined thousands of people mobilizing in the streets for the March 2 day of action for Palestine.

Rafah invasion looms

Israel has threatened to launch an extensive military offensive against the southern city of Rafah on March 10, the first day of the holy month of Ramadan. The Rafah offensive has been met with widespread rejection not only from progressive movements globally, but also from world leaders and international bodies due to the impact on civilians that such an action would have. Over one million Palestinians fled to the city on the border with Egypt over the past five months of Israel's genocidal war on the enclave when the South was claimed to be a safe zone.

World leaders have been warning that an invasion of Rafah would be a humanitarian disaster. Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stated, "The EU asks Israel not to take military action in Rafah that would worsen an already catastrophic humanitarian situation. All civilians must be protected in line with International Humanitarian Law and the ICJ order respected."

Scotland First Minister Humza Yousaf said, "If the [Rafah invasion] does go ahead, shame on us."

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