

## Australia: Protesters Call Out Labor's Rejection of Visas for Palestinians Fleeing Genocide

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*Thousands marched in the 45th weekend of consecutive protests for Palestine over August 17-18, as the official death toll in Gaza passed 40,000.*

Meanwhile, **Opposition Leader Peter Dutton** called for a total ban on visas for those fleeing Israel's genocide. He said accepting Palestinians from Gaza would put "national security at risk".

**Nasser Mashni**, Australia Palestine Advocacy Network President, said Dutton's comments were "another glaring example of the abhorrent and increasingly normalised brand of racist politicking designed to stir up fear and hatred against the Palestinian people".

He said Palestinians deserved the same level of support granted to Ukrainians fleeing Russia's invasion, and condemned Dutton's "stoking of racist stereotypes".

While **Prime Minister Anthony Albanese** condemned Dutton's racist comments as "divisive", Labor has rejected the majority of visa applications from Palestinians fleeing Gaza.

Since October, [more than 7100 visa applications have been rejected](#) and only about 2922 have been granted. Of those, just 236 have been granted since May, after Israel closed the Rafah border crossing.

At the same time, more than 8700 visas have been granted to Israeli citizens and only 235 rejected over the same period.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said on August 17 that thousands of Gazan families continue to be displaced by Israel's evacuation orders.

"The so-called 'humanitarian zone' has shrunk to just 11% of the [Gaza strip], causing chaos and fear among the displaced," [it said](#). "They have nowhere safe to go."

Dutton's racism and dog whistling give Labor cover for continuing to support Israel's genocide.



Thousands marched in Gadigal Country/Sydney. Photo: Pip Hinman

[Zaid Basouny](#), a doctor, told the rally in Gadigal Country/Sydney on August 18 that Labor could easily do something to back its weasel words on supporting a ceasefire, Pip Hinman reports.

“Stop arming Israel and expel the Israeli ambassador, and let Palestinian refugees into the country.”

Basouny announced he is running as an independent in the federal seat of Watson. “Labor has taken the community for granted for too long. For more than 20 years we have stood with Labor. But it has no red line when it comes to Israel.”

Basouny said he will not only be a “voice for Palestine”, he will be a voice for “everyone”. “I will be the voice for justice on all the issues that affect our community,” he said. “My family is still in Gaza and I have an obligation to talk about genocide.”

Watson is currently held by immigration and home affairs minister Tony Burke.



Gadigal Country/Sydney. Photo: Pip Hinman

Dr Jamal Merei, a surgeon who recently returned from Gaza, told the rally that “we need to be on the humanity map”.

He recounted the impact of Israel’s indescribable cruelty from a hospital setting which had little to no equipment and medicine to help save lives. He said polio has now returned to Gaza because of the deprivation.

Merei told the rally of several thousand people of one terrible incident when hungry children found a rare unopened can of tuna. They rushed to open it, only to be ripped to shreds because it was a booby trap.



Protesters march to Anthony Albanese's office in Marrickville. Photo: Stop War On Palestine

Hundreds marched to Albanese's electorate office in Marrickville on August 17, to demand he act on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling and sanction apartheid Israel. Protesters also called for an end to arms trade with Israel and the production of F-35 fighter jet parts in Australia.



Naarm/Melbourne. Photo: Brandon M

Thousands marched from the State Library to Parliament house as part of the 45th weekly protest in Naarm/Melbourne on August 18, reports Elizabeth Bantas.

Sarah Barini, who chaired the rally, said that not only is the Israeli government that is “responsible” for genocide, it is also the “international community” that is responsible, including Australia.

“The Israeli government knows what it’s doing, targeting children, targeting women, targeting the elderly, targeting men just trying to live their lives.”

Sue Bolton, Socialist Alliance Merri-bek councillor, said “most people support Palestine for humanitarian reasons ... what the government is trying to do is drive a wedge between those people and the grassroots Palestinian movement.”



Naarm/Melbourne. Photo: Adam Bremner

Patrick Cook from Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) told the crowd the organisation “does not believe the use of violence by the state leads to good outcomes.

“We have all been watching in horror the state violence inflicted on the people of Gaza. It is trauma that many Aboriginal people can empathise with.

“Killing, imprisoning and assimilating children are all tools of colonisation.”

Gumbainggir activist Uncle Gary Foley said “Aboriginal people of Australia proudly support our Palestinian brothers and sisters”.

“I have been marching for 50 years in support, and they are no closer to a resolution than we are,” he said.

Palestinian-Jordanian international law lecturer Shahad Hammouri said: “We are very far away from the bombing, but we can hear the ground shake.”

“For the past 10 months we have had to stand and look at shredded bodies, our levels of pain incomprehensible to anyone outside of Gaza.”



Refugees from the permanent encampment outside the Department of Home Affairs joined the rally.

Photo: Refugee Women Action for Visa Equality

A large contingent from the [refugee-led encampment for permanent visas](#) joined the protest.

Refugees have been camping outside the then-home affairs minister Clare O’Neil’s Oakleigh office and now the Department of Home Affairs for more than a month demanding an end to life in limbo for about 10,000 people stuck on temporary visas.



A re-enactment of the Fajr Massacre. Photo: Brandon M

The rally also featured a re-enactment of the [Fajr Massacre](#), when Israel bombed a school at which many displaced people were gathered for the *fajr* (dawn) prayer on August 10.

More than 100 Palestinians were killed, and their bodies were destroyed so far beyond recognition that family members were given anonymous 70kg bag of remains to bury.

An “[overwhelming majority](#)” of musicians in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO) passed a vote of no confidence in managing director Sophie Galaise for cancelling pianist Jayson Gillham’s performance after he dedicated a performance “to the journalists of Gaza”.

Popular band The Cat Empire announced it was postponing its upcoming shows with the MSO. “We strongly support Jayson and the talented musicians in the orchestra,” it said.

“We value the principles of freedom of speech, artistic expression and inclusivity. Therefore, in good conscience, we’ve made the decision to postpone next week’s shows at Hamer Hall.”

Meanwhile, a Jewish support worker was sacked from her position at Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda over her support for Palestine, which management said posed a “serious and imminent risk to the health and safety of others.

Australian Services Union (ASU) Members for Palestine said she faced reprimands for distributing union material on a union notice board, wearing a T-shirt displaying a dove and an olive branch and displaying watermelon symbols.

Activists in Kaurua Yerta/Adelaide held a protest outside Caltex Thebarton on August 18 to highlight the petrol companies links to genocide, reports Jordan Ellis.

Caltex is owned by United States fossil fuel giant Chevron, which runs natural gas extraction pipelines off the shore of Palestine.

Chevron is “implicated in Israel’s policy and practice of depriving the Palestine people of their right to sovereignty over their natural resources”, according to the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) National Committee.



Caltex fuels genocide. Photo: Jordan Ellis

Chevron also generates billions of dollars for apartheid Israel and helps fund the genocide in Gaza and uphold the illegal military occupation, making it a key target of the international BDS movement.

“Not only is boycotting Chevron a humanitarian issue,” protesters said. “It is a climate issue. Chevron supports Israel’s lobbying efforts for the construction of the Eastmed Pipeline, a massive European Union sponsored fossil fuel project that will exacerbate the global climate crisis.”

About 50 people joined a protest for Gaza in Muloobinba/Newcastle on August 18, reports Niko Leka. The protest was organised by Palestine Action Group Muloobinba. The march and chanting was led by Halah, daughter of Palestinian Dr Mohamed Elosamy.

Steve O’Brien, Socialist Alliance candidate for Lord Mayor of Newcastle, told the rally there is a “strong tradition” of Palestine solidarity in the city.

He highlighted the pledge campaign organised by Free Palestine NSW and a variety of local groups to ask local council candidates to pledge to support Palestine.

The pledges include supporting an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza; supporting the UN, ICJ and International Criminal Court rulings on genocide and stop sending weapons; to push for council motions calling for ceasefire; push for full disclosure and divestment of council ties with Israel; push council to support Palestinians in the local community; and create “sister city” relationships with Gaza.

He said local councils had an important role to play in opposing genocide.

About 300 people protested outside an Inner West Council meeting on August 13 where a [modest pro-Palestine motion](#) was being debated, reports Rachel Evans.

The motion was put by Greens councillor Dylan Griffiths but was voted down by Labor councillors.

Fairfield for Palestine organised a protest outside a council committee meeting on August 14 calling on all Fairfield City Councillors to pass a motion to disclose and divest any ties with Israel, reports Neville Spencer.



Vigil for Palestine and Lebanon in Bankstown. Photo: Zebedee Parkes

A vigil for Palestine and Lebanon was held in Bankstown on August 17, reports Zebedee Parkes. Pro-Palestine students held student general meetings at Queensland University of Technology, RMIT, University of Melbourne and the University of Adelaide and passed various motions calling on their universities to cut ties with Israel.

There are more student general meetings planned at Deakin University on August 28 and Monash University on September 3.

Students at ANU made the decision to close their Gaza solidarity encampment after 110 days. The encampment forced ANU management to revise its “Socially Responsible Investment” policy and cease all investments in biological weapons, chemical weapons, cluster munitions, nuclear weapons, anti-personnel mines and small arms.

Students have formed a new group, ANU for Palestine, to continue to push the university towards full divestment from Israel and the military-industrial complex.

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*Featured image: Protests against Israel’s genocide continued across the country as the official death toll passed 40,000. Photo: Pip Hinman*

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