

A Global Movement for Union Solidarity With Palestine Is Underway

BY

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From India to Canada to Belgium and many places in between, union members are standing up in solidarity with the Palestinian people, taking action to stop the flow of arms being used by Israel in its destructive war on Gaza.

An appeal from Palestinian unions for global solidarity has elicited unprecedented worker-led actions in Italy, Canada, India, Belgium, Spain, and the UK.

Israel's military attack on Gaza has killed more than eighteen thousand people, injured nearly fifty thousand, and displaced 1.9 million, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

In an urgent call on October 16, Palestinian unions and professional associations asked unions abroad to "Stop Arming Israel," given the military and diplomatic support for Israel coming from the United States and the European Union.

They appealed to unions and workers to refrain from manufacturing, transporting, and handling weapons and surveillance technology destined for Israel. They also formed the organization Workers in Palestine with international allies to build solidarity and support.

“We need three things from the US: munitions, munitions, and munitions,” Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu told local government officials, according to the *Financial Times*, as the assault stretches into its second month.

Netanyahu went on to express concern that the wave of protests in the West might threaten arms shipments — suggesting that international pressure is beginning to work.

“Palestinian workers have been on the front lines in Gaza, saving lives and rescuing communities amidst relentless bombardment,” said Samira A.A. Hasanain, member of the Palestinian General Union of Public Service Workers and Trade–Gaza. “As we continue to carry out our duties, we extend our heartfelt salute to those who are working tirelessly to halt the arms trade with Israel.”

Halting Arms Shipments

Numerous unions worldwide have issued statements heeding the call.

In Spain, workers at the Port of Barcelona refused to transport weapons to Israel and demanded an immediate cease-fire.

Workers at the aerospace company Airbus in Getafe, Spain, organized a march within their factory, displaying a banner: “Airbus workers stand in solidarity with Palestine, no to arms sales to Israel.”

Fourteen Spanish unions and two hundred civil society organizations launched a campaign calling on their government to end the arms trade with Israel.

And unionists from the Catalan Trade Unions Association protested Israel Chemical Limited–Iberia, a subsidiary of ICL Group, which provides Monsanto (now Bayer) with phosphates to produce white phosphorus for the US military, which in turn supplies it to Israel.

White phosphorus is a ghastly incendiary weapon that, when it comes in contact with oxygen, burns as hot as 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit, causing severe burns and organ damage. Israel is accused of using it in civilian areas, in violation of international law.

In Belgium, several transportation unions called on their members not to transport weapons by air, after some reported seeing shipments headed for Israel.

In Italy, dockworkers at the northern Port of Genoa from the independent union Collettivo Autonomo Lavoratori Portuali, with community allies, on November 10 blockaded the movement of cargo onto a ship operated by the Israeli shipping line ZIM. The same ship then faced protests at the southern Port of Salerno.

On November 30, dockworkers affiliated with the European Dockworkers Council took their first major coordinated action across ports in several countries.

India's twelve union federations, representing one hundred million workers, are strongly opposing talks to send one hundred thousand construction workers to replace the Palestinian workers whose work permits Israel has canceled.

“That India is even considering ‘exporting’ workers shows the manner in which it has dehumanized and commodified Indian workers,” a joint union statement read. “Such a step will amount to complicity on India’s part with Israel’s ongoing genocidal war against Palestinians.”

In Canada, indigenous and rank-and-file union organizers boldly shut down four arms factories that were selling weapons to Israel. Workers and community members closed L3Harris plants for the day in Hamilton, Toronto, and Montreal, as well as Lockheed Martin in Ottawa. Labor activists blocked entrances to GeoSpectrum in Dartmouth, a subsidiary of Elbit Systems, a major Israeli arms company.

In the UK, momentum is growing after two successful pickets, including four hundred unionists blocking the entry to the BAE System’s factory in Rochester, in Kent. The campaign by Workers for a Free Palestine aims to draw attention to the role Britain plays in the supply chain of weaponry used by Israel.

Actions escalated on December 7, with one thousand workers blockading arms factories in Bournemouth, Lancashire, Brighton, and Glasgow to halt the production of components for the F-35 fighter jet. There was coordination for similar actions in France, Denmark, and the Netherlands.

Where to Start

In asking for solidarity, the Palestinian unions drew inspiration from history: union solidarity against apartheid in South Africa and global movements against injustice in Ethiopia and Chile. While the

arms trade is the initial focus, the goal is to emerge from this terrible moment with stronger and more sustained union support for Palestinian workers.

Workers in Palestine, the group formed by Palestinian unions, has created a number of online resources, including a guidance sheet for unions on building solidarity with Palestine, a companion guide for community activists, and a model motion.

The comprehensive “Who Arms Israel?” toolkit offers guidance for action and suggests locations. Lockheed Martin, Boeing, BAE Systems, Leonardo, and Raytheon all provide arms crucial to the Israeli military.

As with all union organizing, the greatest successes come through long-term efforts to engage the rank and file.

If you’re just getting started, consider bringing together a group of members to attend a local march or demonstration, or holding an educational event at your union hall with a local Palestine solidarity organization, and then bringing a motion to your next union meeting. (*Labor Notes* held a discussion November 15 of what unions are doing.)

To develop a campaign, look into any direct links your union or employer may have to Israel, such as through the arms trade or through companies in your pension’s portfolio that profit from Israel’s oppression of Palestinians. You could also look at how Palestinian workers in the same industry as you, such as universities or hospitals, are being affected by Israel’s actions. The more direct the link, the better the campaign target.

Successful campaigns on challenging issues require dedication and conviction – but it’s also incredibly fulfilling to know that you’re making a real difference by organizing your fellow union members to stand in solidarity with workers on the other side of the world.

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