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ACTIVISM

SEIU Rank and File say union has further to go to support Palestinian liberation

SEIU Rank and File and Staff welcome movement from Union leadership on Palestine, but demand SEIU stand firmly against genocide – and for Palestinian liberation

BY [PURPLE UP 4 PALESTINE](#) - JANUARY 28, 2024 - 0

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SEIU LOCAL 500 MARCHING FOR PALESTINE (PHOTO COURTESY PURPLE UP FOR PALESTINE)

After months of sustained pressure from the Palestine solidarity movement in the U.S., including the [SEIU rank-and-file](#) and staff organizing across the country within the collective [Purple Up for Palestine](#), SEIU President Mary Kay Henry’s most recent statement in regards to Palestine is a critical affirmation that our organizing is making an impact. While we acknowledge that SEIU’s call for an end to the blockade and occupation of Palestine were steps in the right direction, this statement both fails to address the root cause of the Israeli genocide of Palestinians, and fails to name that genocide for what it is—while regurgitating the same racist, Islamophobic lies that manufactured consent for this catastrophic pillaging of life in Gaza and the West Bank. Members of [Purple Up for Palestine demand](#) that SEIU leadership move beyond their ceasefire statement to truly uphold our union’s values of justice – to oppose racism, colonialism, and oppression on a global scale – especially in regards to Palestine at this urgent moment.

The statement’s central framing of the genocide in Occupied Palestine as a two-sided issue is both dehumanizing and inaccurate. Since 1948, Israel has forcibly displaced mil-

lions of Palestinians from their homes and land, subjected the Palestinian people to a brutal system of apartheid, and bombarded Palestinians with over 30,000 bombs since October alone. As a key player in the labor movement, we should have the ability to name who has structural power and who doesn't—who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed. Peace cannot be realized until the conditions which disrupted peace in the first place are eradicated. When a group of people has had their land and loved ones stolen, their friends and family killed; when they

THE PURPLE UP FOR PALESTINE LOGO

have been starved, raped, occupied and bombed for over 75 years, and have exhausted all available means just to live—a two-sided statement which fails to name the root cause of ongoing violence has no validity or merit.

We oppose SEIU's blatant perpetuation of Islamophobic and anti-Arab propaganda laden with [unsubstantiated claims](#) of sexual violence enacted by Palestinian resistance, with the understanding that there are innumerable proven acts of sexual violence by the IOF. Palestinians are already grappling with the genocide of their loved ones – it is inconceivable to paint them as rapists in order to bolster justification for murder and displacement – especially while Israeli settlers have passed laws stating they will have [“lesser punishment for rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment than Palestinian citizens.”](#) Feminism is not a weapon to be used to demonize the oppressed, it is a tool for liberation of the oppressed.

Beyond the statements made, it is vital we acknowledge how SEIU-endorsed President Joe Biden, a self-proclaimed Zionist, has operated as part of the Zionist entity at every violent step. In addition to Biden's longstanding backing of Israeli violence, he has fueled this current phase of genocide through speeches and material support, sending billions to the Israeli Occupation Forces and bypassing Congress to bomb Yemen for acting

in solidarity with Palestine. We talk about the importance of democracy to SEIU members, yet not even Congress—let alone the people of the U.S.—get a say in whether we have a hand in such monstrous violence. Mary Kay Henry’s most recent statement spoke for “the Muslim member who immigrated to this country from the Middle East to escape war and violence.” This excerpt fails to name the Zionist and imperialist governments, led by the United States, which perpetuate such violence and continue to destabilize countless countries in the Global South through military attacks, coups, blockades, and occupation—all to enrich the same capitalist class which exploits workers in North America.

In December of 2013, Mary Kay Henry wrote a statement mourning the loss of Nelson Mandela, a man who fought tirelessly for the end of apartheid in South Africa. We encourage SEIU Leadership to see the parallels of what Mandela fought for and what Palestinians are fighting for today, and to stand on the right side of history before it is too late. In his own words, Nelson Mandela stated, “We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.”

SEIU leadership are elected to represent members’ voices in politics, and share a commitment to being at the forefront of anti-racism. Therefore in order for SEIU to stay steadfast in these values, and in alignment with the demands of Palestinian trade unions, [we call on SEIU leadership](#) to demand a complete end to the genocide of Palestinians, an end to the siege on Gaza, and an end to U.S. military funding and support to Israel. Especially as the largest healthcare union in the U.S., SEIU must support the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) movement and leadership must protect workers and staff from retaliation for solidarity with Palestine.

We continue to organize in support of these demands across the country in our local unions, alongside our counterparts in groups like [UAW Labor for Palestine](#), [Labor for Palestine](#), [NYC Workers for Palestine](#), and others committed to building a principled, anti-imperialist labor movement in solidarity with Palestine and all people fighting for liberation. If labor stands as a unified front, we know that we can shift power from the

imperialist and capitalist class into the hands of the people, and help create a liberated world where those who were once oppressed can live on to be healthy, whole, and free.

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