

# 8000 march in Cape Town against another Israeli atrocity

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About 8,000 people participated in a hastily organised march to protest the Israeli commando attack on a flotilla of ships carrying aid to Gaza. Organised by the Muslim Judicial Council and various Palestinian Solidarity organisations including the Palestinian Solidarity Group (PSG), the march peacefully made its way to Parliament where a memorandum was handed over by leaders of the protest march to the deputy Foreign Minister Sue van der Merwe. When it was announced that the South African government had recalled ambassador Ishmael Coovadia from Israel, it was enthusiastically received as a first tentative step of a hardening of our government's position to Israel. The only other time post-apartheid SA recalled one of its ambassadors was when the ambassador to Nigeria was recalled when Ken Saro-Wiwa was murdered by the military regime in 1995.

For many in the march it was not difficult to relate to many speakers, who characterised Israel as an apartheid state. Israel's latest atrocity, this time directed at international solidarity activists, reminds one of the actions of the South African apartheid state and its numerous murderous raids into Southern Africa, where members of the liberation movement and solidarity activists were targeted alike.

Increasingly it looks as if Gaza is going to be a diplomatic disaster for Israel. It may finally be the straw that breaks the camel's back and sets in motion a demand that resonated throughout the march for Israel's isolation and for the imposition of sanctions. Speaker after speaker pledged support for BDS - Boycott, disinvestment and sanctions. In this regard they will not be very happy with the government if the recall is meant as just a slap on the wrist and diplomatic relations are retained. Protestors want the government to expel the Israeli ambassador and it is clear this is an obvious target in the campaign by solidarity activists to isolate Israel.

However, for this to be effective Palestinian solidarity will need the backing from large components of the ANC alliance and the mass of South Africans. This highlights one of the weaknesses of today's march: while there was a smattering of activists from other sectors and was endorsed by COSATU, the march was dominated by Muslims that respond to Israel's actions and support for Palestine from a religious and humanitarian point of view. We need the vast majority of South Africans and that means black South Africans to embrace the cause of Palestine.

The efforts of the Palestinian Solidarity Group and its sister organisation in Gauteng the Palestinian Solidarity Coalition that campaign on a secular basis and has developed close ties with COSATU represents a good start towards broadening the support for the isolation of Israel and for the BDS campaign. Marches like today are important but it is too easy for the government to dismiss the calls as belonging to a relatively small part of the population. Much effort is required, especially at a grassroots level to ensure that COSATU and the labour movement's slogan an injury to one is an injury to all reverberates throughout Palestinian solidarity work.

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\* From Amandla! website:

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