

Thousands mourn slain Palestinians outside UK arms dealer

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More than 2,000 people staged a funeral procession to the gates of a BAE Systems factory in Lancashire on Friday

Blackburn, June 5 (RHC)-- Thousands of British pro-Palestine activists gathered in protest outside a notorious arms manufacturer near Blackburn on Friday, demanding an end to Israeli arms sales. Anger was vented in various ways including with a funeral procession, honoring the recent martyrdom of 60 children slain in Gaza.

BAE Systems is one of Britain's biggest arms dealers and is known for building weapons used to target innocent civilians in conflict zones. This is the second week that local residents have come in good

numbers to condemn BAE Systems and more action is being planned.

Weapons firms have been heavily criticized before but rarely have protests of this size and frequency attempted to confront them so directly. Local residents hope that by shaming these dealers of death, they can save lives in Palestine and elsewhere.

Children from local communities carried dozens of small coffins representing the dead to the gates of the factory in Samesbury, outside Blackburn, where BAE makes vital parts for F-35 fighter jets supplied to Israel by the United States. The jets were used in the recent bombardment of Gaza which left more than 250 people dead.

The protest was organized by the Lancashire Peace Forum and supported by Friends of Al Aqsa – the name of the Jerusalem mosque which was attacked by the Israeli military, sparking the latest resistance to Israeli apartheid and Israel's brutal response – and Manchester Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC).

Activists in Blackburn, where a mobilisation involved many people from the town's Muslim community, organised four full double-decker buses to carry protesters to the event.

Four hearses carried the coffins which were then placed at the factory gates by children. Each tiny coffin bore a photograph of one of the children killed in Gaza.

Photographs of the children killed in Gaza also adorned a large banner which protesters fixed to the factory gates, and balloons were released in their memory.

One of the protest organisers, Hanif Dudhwala, said: "During the month of May over 60 children were mercilessly martyred by the Israeli army in Palestine, attacking from the air using fighter jets and Apache helicopters. These weapons of mass destruction are made with components manufactured in the UK."

Asif Mahmood of the Lancashire Peace Forum spoke out against Israel's "continuous atrocities" and "gross violation of human rights." He said that Israel's actions had been condemned by the United Nations as "collective punishment," and slammed Israel's "apartheid policies that clearly discriminate against Arabs living in Israel, treating them as second-class citizens. "In today's world, no human being must be living under such conditions, let alone for the past 70-plus years," he said.

"It is time the international community, including our UK government and corporates such as BAE, recognised their obligations and stop supporting and arming an apartheid state. "As a starting point, the international community, including the UK, must compel Israel to cease all settlement activity, dismantle all settlements and move its civilians from occupied territory. "We also call upon BAE to stop supplying components of the US F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Programme.

"The UK industry produces 15 per cent of the components of every F-35, which was used in the assault against Gaza a few days ago, indiscriminately killing over 200 civilians, including 63 children. "BAE Systems must stop supporting the continued oppression and occupation of the Palestinian people and display its corporate ethics.

"We will continue our demonstrations until BAE Systems stops arming the Israeli state." New groups supporting Palestine have sprung up across north-west England following Israel's latest attacks on Gaza and because of the existence of companies in the region supplying weapons to Israel.

In addition to BAE Systems, the region is home to the Israeli-owned Elbit-Ferranti Technologies plant outside Oldham. The factory manufactures weapons parts and surveillance drones.

It has been targeted for occupations and blockades by Manchester Palestine Action, Manchester PSC and the Oldham Peace and Justice group.

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