

Bolivia tells Palestinians that they are not alone

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Bolivian President Luis Arce (left) shakes hands with Palestinian Ambassador Mahmoud Elalwani (right) during an October 20, 2023 meeting at the presidential residence in La Paz. (Photo: Luis Arce/X)

La Paz, November 2 (RHC)-- Citing "crimes against humanity," Bolivia's socialist administration on Tuesday became the first in the world to completely sever diplomatic relations with Israel over its war on Gaza, while the leftist governments of Chile and Colombia and Jordan's monarchy recalled their ambassadors from Tel Aviv.

"We are sending this official communication to the state of Israel in which, as stated, we make known our decision as the Plurinational State of Bolivia to break diplomatic relations with Israel," Bolivian Minister of the Presidency María Nela Prada told reporters at a Tuesday afternoon press conference.

"We also demand an end to the attacks in the Gaza Strip, which have so far caused thousands of civilian deaths and the forced displacement of Palestinians," she continued.

Prada said the decision by Bolivian President Luis Arce "is consistent with our pacifist policy," adding that her government will pursue "sanctions against those responsible for the war crimes that are being committed against the Palestinian people—not only now, but since many years."

The minister also vowed that Bolivia "will send humanitarian aid to those affected in the Gaza Strip, who are going through a serious health crisis," while calling on "brotherly nations" to "produce collective action" to "avoid genocide" in Gaza.

Speaking after Prada at Tuesday's press conference, Bolivian Deputy Foreign Minister Freddy Mamani said that "within the framework of its principled position of respect for life, Bolivia has decided to break diplomatic relations with Israel, in repudiation and condemnation of the aggressive and disproportionate Israeli military offensive being carried out in the Gaza Strip."

On Monday, Arce urged the United Nations Security Council to "prevent the genocide of the Palestinian people and pave a definitive solution for Palestine to exercise its right to self-determination, to have its own territory without illegal occupations, and fully enjoy the attributes of a free, sovereign, and independent state."

Bolivia's U.N. ambassador, Diego Pary, said Tuesday that his country "will be on the right side of history." "The only formula that can truly guarantee peace and security in the region is the full recognition of state of Palestine in internationally recognized pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital," he informed the U.N. General Assembly.

"Free Palestine is not just a cause of the Palestinian people, but rather a question of global justice and peace," Pary—a Quecha Indigenous leader—continued. "The liberty and dignity of human beings must be respected in all corners of this planet and it is our duty to work together to achieve a future in which Palestine can once and for all be free."

"To our brothers and sisters in Palestine, I reiterate, you are not alone," he added. "Bolivia stands with you, and the peoples of the world are with you."

In 2009, then-Bolivian President Evo Morales -- who, like Arce, is a member of the Movement for Socialism party -- joined leftist former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in breaking off diplomatic relations with Israel over its Operation Cast Lead invasion of Gaza, in which more than 1,400 Palestinians -- most of them civilians -- and 13 Israelis, almost all soldiers, were killed.

Bolivia and Israel restored relations in 2019 during the administration of right-wing former President Jeanine Áñez, who took power after a U.S.-backed coup.

Israel responded to Bolivia's move with a Foreign Ministry statement condemning "Bolivia's support of terrorism and its submission to the Iranian regime, which attest to the values the government of Bolivia represents."

On Tuesday, Chilean President Gabriel Boric recalled Jorge Carvajal, his country's ambassador to Israel, "given the unacceptable violations of international humanitarian law that Israel has incurred in the Gaza Strip." "Chile strongly condemns and observes with great concern that these military operations—which at this point in their development entail collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza—do not respect fundamental norms of international law," he added.

Boric cited the more than 8,000 Palestinians, "mostly women and children," killed by Israeli forces since October 7, when Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel left more than 1,400 people dead and over 200

kidnapped.

The Gaza Health Ministry said Wednesday that at least 8,796 Palestinians -- including nearly 2,300 women and over 3,600 children -- have been killed in Israeli attacks, while another 23,000 suffered injuries.

Last year, Boric put off accepting new Israeli Ambassador Gil Artzyeli's credentials in response to Israeli occupation forces' killing of Odai Trad Salah, a 17-year-old Palestinian boy, in the West Bank.

Boric also angered many Israeli officials last year by announcing that Chile would open an embassy in the illegally occupied West Bank.

Also on Tuesday, Colombia recalled its ambassador to Israel, Isaac Gilinski Sragowicz, with Colombian President Gustavo Petro writing on social media that "if Israel does not stop the massacre of the Palestinian people we cannot be there."

Petro's recall is the latest move in a diplomatic fracas between Colombia and Israel that erupted after Petro likened Israeli leaders' dehumanizing and genocidal statements about Palestinians to "what the Nazis said about the Jews" and called Gaza—often described as the "world's largest open-air prison"—a "concentration camp."

After Israel accused Petro of "hostile and antisemitic statements" and "support for the horrific acts of Hamas terrorists," the Colombian president hit back, saying Israel's war on Gaza is "genocide."

"They do it to remove the Palestinian people from Gaza and take it over," Petro wrote on social media after an Israeli bombardment of the Jabalia refugee camp killed and wounded at least scores and possibly hundreds of Palestinians—one of at least three massacres reportedly carried out by Israeli forces on Tuesday.

"The head of the state who carries out this genocide is a criminal against humanity," Petro added, referring to far-right Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "Their allies cannot talk about democracy."

On Wednesday, Jordan became the first Arab country having normalized relations with Israel to recall its ambassador over the war. Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Al-Safadi directed Rasan al-Majali, the Hashemite kingdom's ambassador to Israel, to return to Amman "as an expression of Jordan's position of rejection and condemnation of the raging Israeli war on Gaza, which is killing innocent people and causing an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe."

Jordan -- which in 1994 became the second Arab nation to officially recognize Israel -- previously withheld its ambassador to Tel Aviv during Cast Lead, and recalled al-Majali in 2019 to protest Israel's imprisonment of Jordanian citizens Hiba al-Labadi and Abdulrahman Miri without charge or trial.

Al-Safadi said al-Majali's return is conditioned upon Israel stopping its war on Gaza and ending the "humanitarian crisis it has caused."

* By Brett Wilkins, a staff writer for Common Dreams.

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