

*Over 1,000 protesters shut down
Chicago train station to demand
ceasefire in Gaza*

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* By Chris Walker, TRUTHOUT *** Published November 13, 2023

Chicago, November 13 (RHC)--More than one thousand demonstrators from across the Midwest gathered at the Ogilvie Transportation Center in downtown Chicago on Monday to demand that the U.S.

government pressure Israel into agreeing to a ceasefire in its genocidal war on Palestinians in Gaza.

The action, organized by Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow, Never Again Action and others, began around 9 a.m. Central Time. More than one thousand demonstrators from several states in the Chicagoland area and beyond took part in the action, interrupting transportation plans for commuters at the station and disrupting business at the nearby Israeli consulate offices, which are in the same building as the Ogilvie Transportation Center.

Demonstrators began the protest without warning, reportedly milling about the station before heading to the escalators at the designated time. The protest went on for several hours.

Protesters came from Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin and all corners of Illinois, according to a JVP press release. Organizers say the demonstration is “the largest Midwest gathering of Jews in solidarity with Palestinians in U.S. history.”

Organizers sought to demonstrate that demands for a ceasefire weren’t just being made in U.S. coastal states, as evidenced by other protests in recent weeks, but in the heartland of the U.S. as well.

“As long as the people of Gaza are screaming, we need to yell louder,” artist and activist Nan Goldin said at the event. “No one expected that such actions could occur anywhere else. But in the Midwest, where progressive Jewish communities are far smaller and separated by distance, there has been such a surge in support for a ceasefire,” JVP said in its press release.

Demonstrators sang songs and chanted slogans, including “Free, Free, Palestine,” “Ceasefire now!” and more. They also held signs in support of a ceasefire, including “Jews Say Ceasefire Now,” “End Israeli Apartheid,” and “NICU Dads against Attacking NICUs,” referencing the Israeli military’s recent attacks on hospitals in Gaza.

State Sen. Robert Peters, a Democrat in the Illinois legislature who recently converted to Judaism, spoke before the demonstrators. “How is it that disproportionately bombing the crap out of kids is gonna make you safer?” Peters asked the crowd, which erupted into cheers. Peters added that there was a need for “global solidarity” to demand “a fucking ceasefire” right now.

At around 10 a.m., organizers alerted the crowd that they could face arrest if they remained around the escalators, and that if they wanted to leave they could continue protesting in front of the building. About three-quarters of protesters did so, with dozens remaining on and around the escalator after the warning was given. Police began arresting protesters around 10:30 a.m.

Arrests have started. #ogilvie #Chicago #ceasefire pic.twitter.com/U3CiCRo60n

Participants in the protest spoke to Truthout about what compelled them to take part.

“I came here from Milwaukee in anger, rage, and determination to demand ceasefire now,” said Jodi Melamed, co-coordinator of Jewish Voice for Peace in Milwaukee. “I want people to see that Jews say ‘no’ to the inhuman cruelty we are seeing in Gaza. I want them to know that Jews see fighting antisemitism, fighting Islamophobia, and fighting for Palestinian lives are all part of the same fight.”

Melamed also condemned Washington for its complicity in Israel’s genocide of Palestinians. “Israel’s war crimes are U.S. war crimes,” Melamed said. “My tax dollars are killing my friends’ families in Gaza. They are carrying out a genocide in our name.”

“I am here today, as a part of the largest contingent of Midwestern Jews in solidarity with Palestinians IN HISTORY, to call for an immediate ceasefire, hostage exchange, and end to the unfolding genocide,” said Simone Pass Tucker, a member of IfNotNow. “I am called to take action because of my Palestinian

friends in the West Bank and in diaspora.”

“We are progressive Jews, and our perspective matters. ... We are here to say that this violence and genocide is not being done in our name,” said JVP member Margo Mejia.

Mejia added:

A major Jewish value is standing up against oppression. Mainstream Jews must open their eyes to the reality that Israel [has] become an apartheid state. ... We must stand up to the violence and madness that the current far right Israeli government is perpetuating within the region and beyond. As American Jews, we must also stand up to our own US government for supporting Israel with exorbitant military aid and weapons.

Jackson Potter, vice president of the Chicago Teachers Union, also participated in the demonstration. In a statement he made earlier in the day, Potter said that the union, which has endorsed calls for a ceasefire, is “deeply concerned by the loss of civilian life and indiscriminate bombing throughout Gaza, where half the Palestinians living there are children.”

“As a fighting union dedicated to the adherence of human rights, our most important representative body voted overwhelmingly in favor of a ceasefire to stop the senseless bloodshed of innocents and call for the return of all hostages,” Potter added. “We can’t stand idly by while the U.S. government continues to send weapons and military aid with the tax dollars that would be better spent addressing the root causes of violence. We need a ceasefire to save Palestinian and Israeli lives, bring Israeli hostages home, and pull the region back from the brink of catastrophic war. And we need more fighting unions across the country to join us in this movement.”

Israel’s current military campaign against Palestinians in Gaza began after a Hamas-led infiltration attack on October 7. Since then, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) has killed over 11,000 Palestinians, including more than 4,500 children.

Several international organizations have condemned Israel’s genocidal siege of Gaza, including its blockade of vital food, water, fuel and medicine, with one United Nations agency describing the situation as a “humanitarian tragedy of colossal proportions.”

Israel announced last week that it would begin four-hour “humanitarian pauses” in its relentless bombardment of Gaza following pressure from U.S. leaders, including President Joe Biden. The announcement has been condemned by critics for whitewashing Israel’s horrific violence against Palestinians.

“There is something so uniquely evil about ‘a humanitarian pause.’ It’s an Orwellian demand to continue taking human life indiscriminately with moments of reprieve, so that the kill have some food, water and bandages before they are targeted again,” media critic Sana Saeed said on social media. “It is torture before the kill.”

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