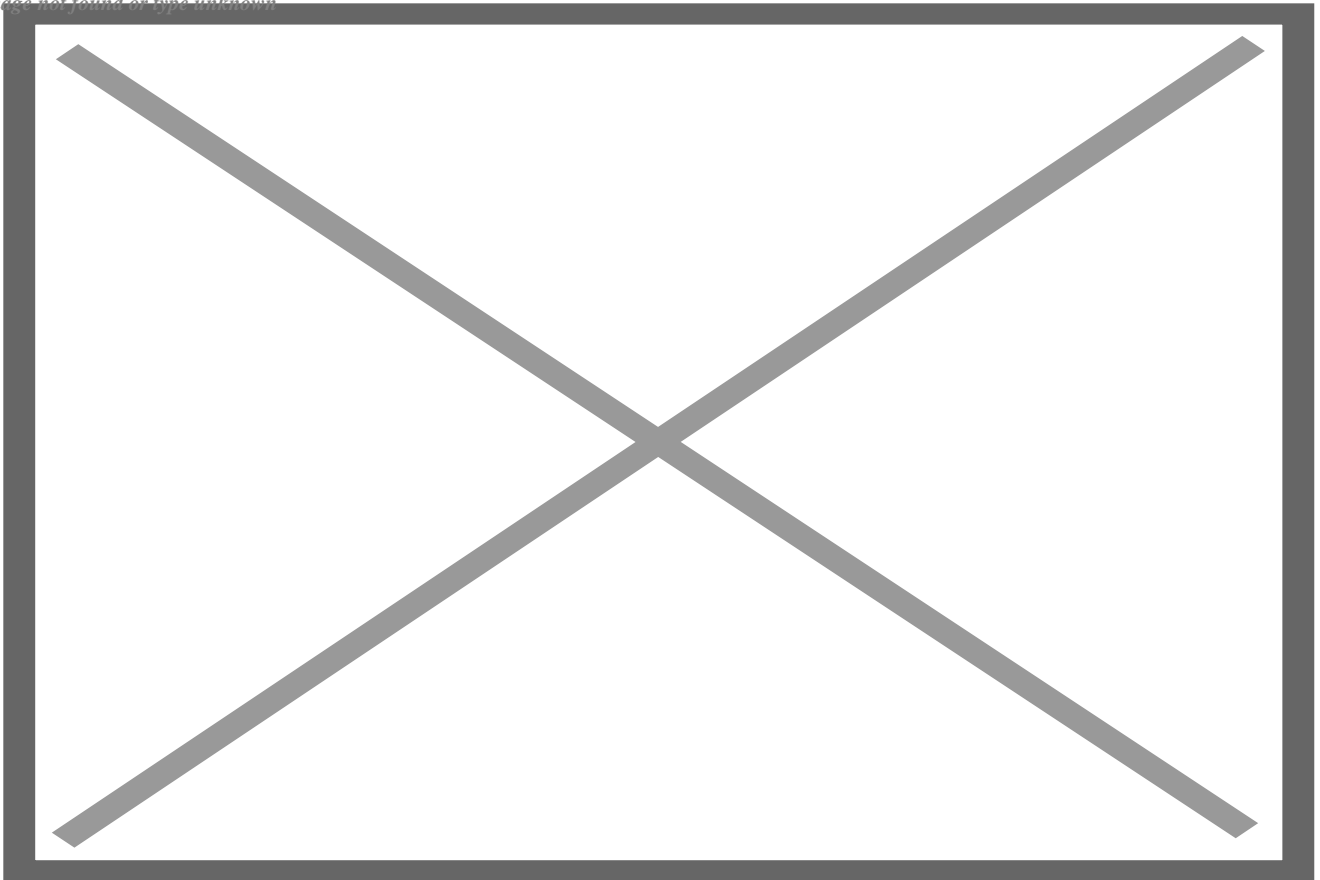


Millions around the world protest Israel's genocidal war of aggression

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London, February 18 (RHC)-- Millions of people have taken to the streets around the world to protest against the war in Gaza as Israel pledges to go forward with its offensive in Rafah in southern Gaza.

Waving pro-Palestinian flags and banners, thousands marched through the streets of Madrid, Spain to demand an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

The crowd snaked through closed-off streets in the Spanish capital from Atocha train station to the central Plaza del Sol square behind a large banner that read: Freedom for Palestine. Many carried signs that

read “Peace for Palestine” and “Don’t ignore Palestinian suffering.”

At least six ministers from Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s cabinet also took part in the demonstration, five from the left-wing Sumar party, his junior coalition partners, as well as Transport Minister Oscar Puente of the prime minister’s Socialist party.

“We need an immediate ceasefire, an end to the killing and attacks against innocents, we must achieve the release of all hostages,” Puente told reporters at the start of the march. In the UK’s capital London, approximately 250,000 people took part in the protest demanding a ceasefire in Gaza, according to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC).

Reporting from London, Al Jazeera’s Harry Fawcett said that according to organisers the demonstration taking place in London is expected to be among the top three in terms of size since the start of the war in Gaza in October.

“This could be an indication of the increasing concern about the situation in Gaza, on the cusp of Israel’s intended intensification of military operations in Rafah in the south. YouGov has issued a poll saying that two-thirds of people in the UK now support an immediate ceasefire,” Fawcett said.

Fawcett said that the main body of the march arrived outside the Israeli Embassy, where solidarity speeches and a static protest took place. The organizers also timed the beginning of the march to ensure that an event at a nearby Jewish synagogue was over.

More than 1,500 police officers were on the streets in London to police the protest. According to the Metropolitan Police, 12 people were arrested for placard-related offences, assaults on officers and refusal to remove face coverings.

“Despite these arrests, the overwhelming majority who took part were peaceful and acted entirely with the law,” the police said in a statement on the social media platform X. Pro-Israeli groups have attempted to paint the mass pro-Palestinian movement in the UK as anti-Semitic. The protest movement regards that as an attempt to whitewash Israel’s assault on Gaza, which has now killed almost 29,000 people.

Pro-Palestine protests also took place in Sweden and other countries, where people demanded that Israel stop its offensive on Rafah and called for a ceasefire.

Protests also took place in Israel’s capital Tel Aviv and outside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s residence in West Jerusalem with demonstrators calling for a captive-prisoner exchange deal and immediate elections in the country.

The rallies took place in the wake of Netanyahu’s decision last week not to send an Israeli delegation to Cairo for further negotiations on a deal to release more than 100 captives still held in Gaza.

The Hostages and Missing Families Forum called the decision a “death sentence” for the remaining captives.

But in a news conference on Saturday, Netanyahu denounced the possibility of elections in Israel right now. He also said that Israel’s military “pressure is working” against Hamas, claiming the army has “reached areas in Gaza that the enemy never imagined”.

“Whoever is telling us not to operate in Rafah is telling us to lose an ear,” he added, saying that the Israeli army would attack Rafah – a city in southern Gaza that now hosts more than one million displaced Palestinians – even if a deal to release captives is reached with Hamas.



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