

Australian police attack pro-Palestine protests blockading Israeli ship

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Melborne, January 24 (RHC)-- Australian police forces have attacked pro-Palestine protesters at a port in the Australian city of Melbourne, who were calling for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip amid Israel's ongoing brutal war against the besieged territory.

Police pepper sprayed, arrested and dispersed the protesters who gathered at Port of Melbourne on Monday, as they continued the blockade of an Israel-owned ship at the city dock for a fourth consecutive day.

Mohammed Helmy, one of the protest organizers, said the protesters faced a heavy crackdown, adding that at least 10 people were arrested at the site. "At around 4 p.m. police arrived, there were over 150 officers from different forces, including riot police and Viper force which is a force normally used for organized crime gangs," he said.

Some of the police were on horseback, which prompted the protesters to call for more people to join them, he added. Helmy went on to say that the police used the kettling technique to control the crowd, containing protesters in a confined space by surrounding them, as the number of protesters grew to 300.

He further explained that the main purpose behind the protest was to disrupt the activities of Zim, an Israeli-owned shipping company, and to "stop the genocide in Gaza." "We felt that the crackdown was aggressive and over-powering and did not respect the humanitarian cause of the action," he said.

Helmy also noted that Melburnians have vowed to continue their actions against the "genocide" in Gaza, until it stops. "On some days, there could be up to three or four separate actions on the same day against the genocide," he explained. Helmy also said the blockade at the Port of Melbourne came after protesters felt that not enough was being done despite their continued protests and rallies to call for a ceasefire in Gaza.

The blockade was therefore aimed at inflicting losses on Zim, "a company that directly supports the genocide," and to send a direct global message by garnering attention, he added.

On Friday, protesters prevented an Israeli-owned ship from being unloaded at the Port of Melbourne, resulting in four cargo ships being stranded along with 30,000 containers. The blockade has been going on since then.

Nasser Mashni, Australia's Palestine Advocacy Network president, has also said the decision to create a blockade and demonstrate came after months of peaceful protests that seemed to have "fallen on deaf ears," stressing that it was "time to elevate our action" as Israel's brutal aggression against Gaza continues.

The latest development came a day after protesters prevented workers from getting to their jobs at the port, while some of the demonstrators held up banners with the words "block Zim ships."

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