

Brazil withdraws ambassador to Israel after Gaza war criticism

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Lula has been a frequent critic of Israel's offensive in the besieged Gaza Strip, which in February he compared to the Holocaust [File: Al Jazeera]

Brasilia, May 30 (RHC)-- Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has withdrawn his country's ambassador to Israel after months of tensions between the two countries over Israel's war on Gaza.

The move was announced in Brazil's official gazette on Wednesday. There was no immediate response from Israel.

Lula has been a frequent critic of Israel's offensive in the besieged Gaza Strip, which he compared to the Holocaust this year. That led Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz to summon the Brazilian ambassador to the national Holocaust museum in West Jerusalem for a public reprimand.

Ambassador Frederico Meyer has been transferred to Geneva and will join Brazil's permanent mission to the United Nations and other international organisations.

Lula, a prominent voice for the Global South whose country currently holds the rotating presidency of the G20, has faced pushback at home from the far right over his Holocaust comments. However, he has received support elsewhere in Latin America, notably from Colombian President Gustavo Petro, who has also severed ties with Israel.

Both Brazil and Colombia have supported South Africa's complaint against Israel before the International Court of Justice in The Hague, alleging the Gaza assault amounts to a breach of the Genocide Convention.

More than 36,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 81,000 wounded in Israel's war on Gaza. The death toll in Israel from Hamas's attacks on October 7, which sparked the war, is at least 1,139, and dozens of people are still being held captive in Gaza.

As the assault has dragged on, Israel has faced a growing global outcry as the focus turns to Rafah, the last city in Gaza to see a ground offensive. Israel is carrying out these attacks as it continues to impose severe restrictions on the entry of much-needed humanitarian aid.

Before the Rafah offensive began on May 7, the United Nations had warned that up to 1.4 million people were sheltering in the city. Since then, one million have fled the area, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) has said.

The conflict has also revived a global push for Palestinians to have a state of their own.

Norway, Spain and Ireland on Tuesday formally recognised the State of Palestine, breaking with the long-held position of Western powers that a Palestinian state can only be declared as part of a negotiated peace with Israel.

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