

# “What we saw was nothing short of an apocalyptic film”: US travel nurse describes experience volunteering in Gaza

Erik Schreiber  
16 January 2025

A collection of healthcare worker associations and activist groups held a rally and press conference in Teaneck, New Jersey, on January 12 to oppose Israel’s genocide in Gaza. The organizers included Doctors Against Genocide, Labor for Palestine, Healthcare Workers for Palestine, the New Jersey chapter of American Muslims for Palestine and the National Arab American Medical Association. Though several of the speakers made powerful and moving remarks, they also called for continued appeals to the Democratic and Republican parties, which have been complicit in the genocide since it was launched by the Netanyahu regime last year. The past 15 months have proven the bankruptcy of this perspective.

Zahed, a travel nurse with more than 15 years’ experience, spoke at the rally about his time providing volunteer medical care in Gaza last March. After the rally, the *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed Zahed about his experience.

**WSWS:** When you volunteered to provide care in the Gaza Strip, what kind of patients did you treat? What condition were patients in? What kind of wounds did you see?

**Zahed:** The patients that we saw, most of them were victims of genocide. [They were] the victims of gunshot wounds, hit by shrapnel, explosive injuries, being stuck under rubble. These were individuals that were found to have metal fragments in their bodies, in their heads, in their abdomens. Many of them had to lose limbs. Most of them happened, unfortunately, to be children.

The organization was not really allowed to go outside the campus in Rafah. But what we saw as we were entering the city and driving toward the campus was nothing short of an apocalyptic film. There was rubble everywhere. There was garbage everywhere. The odors were very, very pungent: anything from decaying human flesh, to sewage, to garbage, to the smell of smoke. It was an assault on all your senses. We were at the European Gaza Hospital.

**WSWS:** What kind of medical supplies did you have to work with?

**Zahed:** This was before the Rafah crossing was closed. We were entering through the Egyptian side, so we were able to take medical supplies with us. It was never enough, though. The basics of these medical supplies included gloves, gauze, first aid, surgical equipment and stuff like that.

However, while I was there, there were still things that were very, very short. An endotracheal tube is something that you use to secure an airway in a patient who’s going to be put on a ventilator. If that patient were to die, they would reuse it on a different patient. In America, that would never happen. If something hits the floor, and it’s never been used, it would get thrown out immediately. But in a

situation where you don’t have any supplies, you have to do what you have to do.

**WSWS:** How did being there and treating these patients affect you?

**Zahed:** It was a privilege for me to be selected to go. It was an honor for me to be there and take care of these human beings. What I discovered while I was there was that these are some of the most giving people, the most resilient people, the strongest in their faith. They have so much integrity and dignity and pride. They take care of each other. They look after each other. For me to witness that and to be part of that was absolutely amazing.

I was there for two weeks. [In that time] you can’t really make that much of an impact on their situation. But what did happen in those two weeks is that they collectively impacted me. I am not a native Arabic speaker by any means, yet most of the doctors and nurses in the hospital spoke English fairly well. Most of their charting is done in English.

I learned from them what it means to really, truly love your fellow man, what it means to truly be sacrificial and to be unconditional, in terms of taking care of, having concern for or loving your fellow man. I remember during COVID in America, in our crisis, there were nurses that wouldn’t show up to work because the bonuses for COVID weren’t that great. [In Gaza] you had doctors and nurses who had been displaced multiple times, who had been without salary for months, who had definitely lost at least one family member, all showing up to work as scheduled to take care of strangers. They show up to work because they have a job, they have an obligation to their community.

**WSWS:** Biden has been funding the genocide. There has been more than a year of protests and a reporter asked Biden whether the protests had changed his mind. He said, bluntly, “No.”

Trump is on the record as saying that he thinks Israel should “finish the job.” He also said, in effect, “Release the hostages or else.” He’s threatening that “all hell will break out” in the Middle East unless the hostages are released.

But there are grounds for optimism. Protests are still going on. There’s mass opposition around the world, but the question is what direction this opposition is taking. That is the question of questions: what orientation these protests take.

**Zahed:** I feel that the majority of the American population is for a complete ceasefire, because there’s still humanity left in America. I don’t think humanity ever left. It was just maybe suppressed, maybe quiet. But the more this this genocide continues, the more people are becoming vocal, and the more rallies you see. The crowd is getting

bigger and bigger. I don't feel like any politician should ignore the cries of the American public.

**WSWS:** That's correct, but they're ignoring the fires in Los Angeles right now. This is a city that's been under Democratic control for decades, and the supposedly progressive mayor recently cut the fire department's budget by \$17 million. There are 186 billionaires in California and no water pressure in the fire hydrants. All the resources of society are being used to further enrich the already wealthy and to conduct predatory wars abroad, so that the United States can maintain its dominant position in the world.

Our position is that appealing to capitalist politicians is not going to go anywhere. It hasn't gone anywhere. We have to turn toward the working class.

**Zahed:** The working class has the power to change the political class, and that's what I hope in America will happen. It will change the global perspective, and it'll bring justice to everyone, because America is unique. It's a very powerful country, and for the most part, the world looks to America for justice.

The American population needs to somehow encourage their leaders to vote in the correct way and to end genocide. Keep the money in America. Stop sending it to foreign countries. We shouldn't have homeless people. We shouldn't have potholes. We should have free college education. That's not a privilege that other countries should be afforded based on the tax dollars in America. Our taxes are going up, but we're not seeing the fruits of those taxes.

Like you said, in California, you have this entire region of California that's ablaze, and there's no funding to take care of that. We have people who are still homeless in North Carolina from the recent hurricane, and that should not be the case. These are the people that need to voice their opinions, and they need to get politically involved and active and bring about that change.

**WSWS:** People like Trump and Biden represent the interests of billionaires like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos. These politicians are doing the bidding of the banks and the corporations. Both parties represent this class. The only way to stop the genocide, to stop the war against Iran that's being prepared, is to orient toward the working class. Ultimately, the working class has to take political power.

You mentioned that this tremendous wealth in America is not being used to put out fires or to prevent infection. Everything is subordinated to profit. The working class needs to take political power, abolish the capitalist system and organize production to meet human need.

**Zahed:** People over profit.

**WSWS:** Yes. The only way this is going to happen is if all the oligarchs are expropriated. Amazon, for example, and the banks need to be run by the working class in the interests of the working class, which is the majority of the world's population. And this can't be limited to the United States. It's got to be an international revolution, because we're in a global economy. Everything is interconnected.

You said that American resources shouldn't go abroad to fund other people. That's not our perspective. We're fighting for the international unity of the working class.

**Zahed:** It has to start somewhere, and I believe America could be the pioneer to starting this movement. The average American, I think, is not educated and not aware of everything that you just talked about. The media is very suppressed. It's very controlled. Fortunately, because of journalists like yourselves, information about the world is becoming more and more available, especially in the palms of our hands.

This genocide is the world's most documented genocide ever. It's a good thing and it's a bad thing. It's a good thing because it's opening the eyes of the American public and it's shifting the needle toward making things right and correcting whatever has been wrong so far. And it's bad because it's a genocide. It's something that should never have happened. So, once this movement starts, and it already has, I don't think it's going to stop until there is a truly free global environment where people can move freely and live freely.

This whole thing that's happening in California, it hit home. That's why you see it all over the media. You have celebrities who are on TV who have lost their homes. They [non-celebrities] don't know what to do. Their insurance policy has gone to hell, so they don't know what they're gonna do about their house. And they've been displaced. I can't say that their displacement is anything close to the displacement of the people in the Gaza. The people here, when they got displaced, got to move from an unsafe situation through a safe passage to a safe location. In Gaza, you go from one unsafe location through an unsafe passage to another unsafe location. There's no safety there, right? So, all that being broadcast on social media, on national media, is shifting the needle. It's just not as fast as we would like.

**WSWS:** You're right that technology is allowing this information to get out there, and we're all more interconnected than ever. There's tremendous potential in the current situation and the technology that we have. But you also pointed out that the level of consciousness is not adequate to the situation. There's a lack of political perspective, a lack of understanding about what's going on. The role of our party, the Socialist Equality Party, is to provide this understanding and to provide political leadership to the working class. Only the working class can put an end to the genocide, the historic levels of inequality, the retrogression in public health. But it needs to understand its objective position in capitalist society and its historic role. This is our perspective. What do you think?

**Zahed:** I think you're right. I think knowledge is power. Educating your average American is probably key. The only way that's going to happen is to utilize whatever resources we have. You have to raise awareness.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**