Man sets arm on fire as marches across US mark Gaza war anniversary

AFP – Thousands marched in US cities from Washington to Los Angeles on Saturday, demanding an immediate ceasefire as the war in Gaza nears the one-year mark, with a man attempting to self-immolate in protest.

The marches were part of a worldwide day of action against the devastating war, which has recently seen Israel intensify its military operations into Lebanon.

The war was sparked on October 7 when Palestinian armed group Hamas attacked Israel, resulting in the deaths of 1,205 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures that include hostages killed in captivity.

More than 41,825 Palestinians, a majority of them civilians, have been killed in Israel's military campaign in the Gaza Strip since the war began, according to data provided by the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The UN has acknowledged the figures as reliable.

In Washington, more than a thousand angry protesters demonstrated outside the White House, with many demanding an end to US military and other aid to its strategic ally, Israel.

"The US government has really shown what side of history it is on," Zaid Khatib, an organizer with the Palestinian Youth Movement, told AFP.

"The US government has performed and co-signed the most evil atrocities that we've seen of this century."

Protesters waved Palestinian and Lebanese flags, among others, with many holding up signs and chanting in unison to demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

Almost two hours into the protest, a man approached the demonstration site and attempted to set himself on fire, AFP journalists saw.

He succeeded in lighting his left arm ablaze before bystanders and police rushed to his aid, dousing him with water and extinguishing the flames using their keffiyehs, traditional Palestinian scarves.

“I’m a journalist and we neglect it, we spread the misinformation,” he shouted, in between screams of pain as the fire on his arm was put out.

Police said the man was being treated for “non-life threatening injuries.”

– ‘Ethnic cleansing’ –

In New York, thousands marched in the city’s famed Times Square neighborhood, some carrying pictures of people killed by Israel’s military offensive in Gaza, which has left much of the territory in rubble.

Among those marching was Cornel West, a prominent rights activist and an independent candidate running in the US presidential election.

“I’m here to forever be in solidarity with people undergoing a vicious genocide,” he told AFP. “Dealing with ethnic cleansing it’s getting worse, it’s been a whole year now. You know, we got to keep fighting.”

The United States is one of Israel’s closest allies, providing billions in military assistance – a subject that protesters in both cities focused on.

“As an American we’re tired of our tax money going to Israel to bomb kids in Palestine and then Lebanon,” said Daniel Perez, a New York resident.

Protesters also took to the street in Los Angeles, many holding signs calling for an end to “genocide” in Gaza.

In Washington, protesters’ cries for “justice” and “peace” reverberated off office buildings in downtown, with the crowd animated by a mix of righteous anger and raucous solidarity.

Laila, an American of Palestinian and Lebanese descent, told AFP the past year had left her disillusioned with her country’s leaders — so much so that she was unlikely to vote in November.

“It all disgusts me now,” she said. “It’s all a lie.”

AFP