Assange joins pro-Palestinian protest on Sydney Harbour Bridge

AFP:: Tens of thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters including WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange marched across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on Sunday, closing the world famous landmark.

Assange, who returned to Australia last year after his release from a high-security British prison, was pictured surrounded by family and marching alongside former Australian foreign minister and New South Wales premier Bob Carr.

France, Britain and Canada have in recent weeks voiced, in some cases qualified, intentions to diplomatically recognise a Palestinian state as international concern and criticism have grown over malnutrition in Gaza.

Australia has called for an end to the war in Gaza but has so far stopped short of a decision to recognise a Palestinian state.

But in a joint statement with more than a dozen other nations on Tuesday it expressed the "willingness or the positive consideration… to recognise the state of Palestine as an essential step towards the two-State solution".

The pro-Palestinian crowd braved heavy winds and rain to march across the bridge, chanting "ceasefire now" and "free Palestine".

New South Wales police said it had deployed hundreds of extra staff across Sydney for the march.

Mehreen Faruqi, the New South Wales senator for the left-wing Greens party, told the crowd gathered at central Sydney's Lang

Park that the march would “make history”.

She called for the “harshest sanctions on Israel”, accusing its forces of “massacring” Gazans, and criticised New South Wales premier Chris Minns for saying the protest should not go ahead.

Dozens of marchers held up banners listing the names of thousands of Palestinian children killed since the Gaza war broke out after an October 2023 attack by Palestinian militant group Hamas.

Labor backbench MP Ed Husic attended the march and called for his ruling party, led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, to recognise a Palestinian state.

Assange did not address the crowd or talk to the media.

Israel is under mounting international pressure to end the bloodshed that has killed more than 60,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza’s health ministry.

Hamas’s 2023 attack resulted in the deaths of 1,219 people, mostly civilians, according to a tally based on official figures.

Of the 251 hostages taken during the attack, 49 are still being held in Gaza, including 27 the Israeli military says are dead.

The Harbour Bridge is over a kilometre long and was opened in 1932.

Since then its twin parabolic arcs have become world famous, a symbol of both Sydney and of Australia.

AFP