



Israeli Attack on Humanitarian Aid Shipment
Global Day of Action
Saturday, June 5, 1 pm
Public Rally, Victoria Park
(Spring Garden at South Park), Halifax

We call on everyone to join the people of the world in condemning the attack on the Freedom Flotilla and denounce the Zionist attacks on the Palestinian people and all those who support their just cause. June 5 also marks the 43rd anniversary of the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Our action aims to draw the world's attention to Israel's continuing illegal occupation, its refusal to abide by international law, and its massacre of innocent humanitarian workers. Tell your friends and family.

Join the Daily Pickets & Vigil (June 2-4), 4-5 pm – Maritime Mall (where the passport office is), Barrington St. & foot of Spring Garden Rd.

Speakers from Canada Palestine Association • Canadian Union of Postal Workers • Canadian, Arabs & Jews for A Just Peace • Independent Jewish Voices • Organized by Ad Hoc Committee to Defend Palestine (E-mail: shunpike@shunpiking.com • Tel: 902.477.0477)

Call for Action by the Palestinian National Committee

Palestinian civil society calls for intensifying boycott and sanctions as Israel massacres humanitarian relief workers and international solidarity activists

Occupied Palestine, 1 June 2010 – The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) strongly condemns last night's fatal attack by the Israeli navy on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to the occupied and besieged Gaza Strip. The BNC conveys Palestinian civil society's condolences to the families and friends of those killed by the Israeli assault and warmly salutes the principled solidarity and moral commitment of all those involved in the Gaza Freedom Flotilla.

In response, the BNC calls on international civil society to:

- Mobilize for an emergency Global BDS Day of Action on Saturday 5 June 2010 – the 43rd anniversary of the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem
- Pressure governments to start implementing trade sanctions and arms embargos

We call specifically on transport and dock workers and unions around the globe to:

- Refuse to load/offload Israeli ships and airplanes, following the historic example set by the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union in Durban in February 2009 and endorsed by the Maritime Union of Australia (Western Australia).

The Flotilla, which was attacked in international waters in violation of international law, was carrying relief supplies that Israel has persistently prevented from entering Gaza, including medical supplies, cement and food. Israel's siege is considered a form of collective punishment, a war crime under Article 33 of the *Geneva Convention*. All of the relief workers and activists on board the Gaza Flotilla ships were unarmed. In legal terms, Israel's military assault against the Flotilla is an act of aggression against the countries whose flags the ships were carrying; politically, it is an assault against human decency and all people of conscience around the world who support freedom and justice.

Israel's impunity is the direct result of the international community's failure to hold it accountable for its ongoing occupation, colonization and apartheid against the Palestinian people. Israel's most recent war

crimes committed in Gaza and documented in the Goldstone report as well as crimes committed in 2006 against the Lebanese people did not trigger any UN or official sanctions, entrenching Israel's feeling of being above the law. In fact, Israel's grave violation of international law was recently rewarded when the OECD voted unanimously to accept its membership. The BNC urges international civil society to end this deep and fatal complicity.

The BNC also welcomes and affirms the call of the UN expert on human rights Prof. Richard Falk who stated, "It is time to insist on the end of the blockade of Gaza. The worldwide campaign of boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel is now a moral and political imperative, and needs to be supported and strengthened everywhere."

The UN Security Council has, unsurprisingly, failed to hold Israel accountable for its aggression against the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. The BNC calls upon the UN General Assembly, the European Union, the Arab League and their member states to undertake practical measures which will end Israel's impunity for its massive and systematic violation of international law, including by:

- Immediately ending all collusion with Israel's unlawful blockade of the Gaza Strip and pressuring Israel's to guarantee unrestricted humanitarian access and freedom of movement of people and products into and out of the Gaza Strip;
- Bringing to justice all Israeli officials and military personnel who took the decision and/or implemented this latest massacre as well as earlier war crimes;
- Pressuring your government to immediately suspend arms trade with Israel, and to implement trade sanctions and arms embargos against Israel.
- In particular, we call on the EU to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement, the Mercosur to suspend the FTA, India to reverse decision to hold negotiations around an India-Israel FTA and to stop arms deals with Israel, and Turkey to impose an arms embargo on Israel.

The BNC also calls on people of conscience and citizen groups all over the world to intensify BDS campaigns against Israel as the most effective means of holding it accountable to international law and ending its fatal impunity.

Flotilla: Did Israel deliberately murder civilians aboard Freedom Flotilla?

Free Gaza Movement, June 2, 2010 (Slightly edited for reasons of space)

On May 31, 2010 elite Israeli military commandos stormed six humanitarian aid ships of the 'Freedom Flotilla' to Gaza, killing 9 civilian passengers and injuring dozens more. The killings are indefensible.

PRIOR TO THE ISRAELI ATTACK – The Freedom Flotilla

The Freedom Flotilla is an effort by a coalition of human rights and humanitarian organizations to nonviolently break Israel's illegal blockade, and deliver needed humanitarian and developmental aid to the Palestinians of Gaza. 700 passengers from 40 countries joined the flotilla, including: human rights workers, humanitarian aid workers, Members of Parliament, doctors, nurses, teachers, community leaders, and international journalists.

The lead coalition partners included:

- Insani Yardim Vakfi (IHH), the largest coalition partner, contributing 2 Turkish-flagged cargo ships, the Turkish-flagged passenger ship "Mavi Marmara," and 380 Turkish nationals to the effort.
- The European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza, contributing the Greek-flagged passenger ship "Sfendoni."
- The Free Gaza Movement, contributing the U.S.-flagged passenger ship "Challenger I."
- A Ship to Gaza, Sweden, and A Ship to Gaza, Greece, contributing the Greek-flagged cargo ship "Eleftheri Mesogeios."

All ships were thoroughly searched by local port authorities in Greece and Turkey prior to their departure. The coalition hired an independent security firm to search the ships and certify that no weapons were on board. All passengers went through nonviolence training and were searched for weapons prior to boarding. The Turkish government, a member-state of the NATO alliance, vetted all the Turkish passengers to insure there was no one with ties to extremist groups. These ships were deliberately taken to prevent Israeli propaganda officials from ever being able to claim that the Freedom Flotilla posed any 'security risk' to Israel.

There was a live satellite feed broadcasting the voyage from the Mavi Marmara, as well as GPS transponders showing the exact location of the flotilla at all times. The intention was never to 'provoke a confrontation,' but simply to deliver much-needed humanitarian aid to besieged Gaza, and in so doing to draw attention to the brutal Israeli policies that are forcing the Palestinian people into a state of impoverished dependency.

PRIOR TO THE ISRAELI ATTACK – The Israeli Government

On 27 May, Bloomberg News reported that Israel was threatening to use its military forces and "use all available means to stop the ships" ('Israel Threatens Naval Action to Stop Aid Ships Bound for Gaza').

On 28 May Associated Press reported that the Israel was prepared to stop the flotilla "at any cost," including being "prepared to use force." ('Israeli gunships head to sea to block flotilla'). Masked naval commandos were being "trained" to stop the flotilla.

On 1 June the Guardian reported that Matan Vilnai, Israeli deputy Defense Minister, suggested that the IDF had sabotaged several of the ships. The flotilla was delayed by two days due to unexpected mechanical problems. 3 of the original 9 ships intending to join the flotilla were forced to drop off. ('Gaza aid flotilla: Israeli sabotage suspected,' Guardian, 1 June 2010)

THE MASSACRE ABOARD THE MARI MARMARA

On 31 May, under cover of darkness, Israeli military forces surrounded the Freedom Flotilla in international waters. Armed and masked commandos stormed all 6 ships from sea and from air, killing 9 civilians. After more than 2 days, Israel still refuses to release the names and identities of the dead, nor even confirm the number of passengers killed by their forces.

An Israeli military spokesperson, Avital Leibovich, confirmed the attack took place in international waters. "This happened in waters outside of Israeli territory, but we have the right to defend ourselves." Did the passengers aboard the Mari Marmara possess a similar right to defend themselves?

Israel released highly-edited videos of the confrontation, claiming that civilian passengers aboard the Mari Marmara attempted to "lynch" the well-armed military commandos when they stormed the ship. Defense Minister Ehud Barak praised the commandos, stating: "You carried out the mission and prevented the flotilla from reaching Gaza. We need to always remember that we aren't North America or Western Europe, we live in the Middle East, in a place where there is no mercy for the weak and there aren't second chances for those who don't defend themselves." ('Barak: In the Middle East, there is no mercy for the weak,' Haaretz, 2 June 2010.)

One wonders whether this sentiment extends to the civilians killed by those commandos.

In contrast to the Israeli account, which is self-evidently absurd, Jamal Elshayyal of Al-Jazeera was able to issue a brief report before Israeli forces cut all communications with the ships. His report contradicts the Israeli version, stating that Israel fired live ammunition on the civilians after they had raised a white flag.

Eyewitness testimony from the handful of passengers who have been released directly contradicts Israel's version. According to Nilufer Cetin, who sailed on the Mari Marmara with her one-year-old baby, "The operation started immediately with firing. First it was warning shots, but when the Mavi Marmara wouldn't stop these warnings turned into an attack," she said. "There were sound and smoke bombs and later they used gas bombs. Following the bombings they started to come on board from helicopters." ('Israelis opened fire before boarding Gaza flotilla, say released activists,' Guardian, 1 June 2010)

Haneen Zoubi, Member of the Israeli Knesset, one of several parliamentarians aboard, stated that warships surrounded the Mavi Marmara, firing on the ship before the commandos stormed aboard. "Israel had days to plan this military operation. They wanted many deaths to terrorize us and to send a message that no future aid convoys should try to break the siege of Gaza." ('Israeli Knesset member rejects navy account of attack,' Irish Sun, 2 June 2010)

Yonatan Shapira, former pilot in the IDF for the very squadron that conducted the assault on the Mavi Marmara, stated: "No Israeli pilot would drop commandos on a ship in the middle of the sea, in the middle of the night, during such an operation without the soldiers carrying live ammunition ... there is no doubt that the soldiers had and were prepared to use live ammunition."

In an interview on the Diane Rehm Show on 2 June, a nationally-broadcast radio program in the US, **Michael Oren, Israeli ambassador, stated that in planning their assault on the Marmara, the Israeli government had concluded that the ship was "too large to stop with nonviolent means."**

There is clear evidence that the State of Israel may have deliberately and with forethought intended to provoke a conflict in order to assassinate civilians sailing aboard the Freedom Flotilla, and therefore violently discourage any further attempts to deliver humanitarian aid to the Palestinians of besieged Gaza.

The Free Gaza Movement calls upon the international community to enforce international standards and laws, fully investigate these crimes, and hold Israeli officials accountable for the willful murder of international human rights and humanitarian aid workers aboard the Freedom Flotilla.