



LIVE FROM *Palestine*

TESTIMONIES
FROM THE
NONVIOLENT
RESISTANCE

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUP

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The Israeli siege of and occupation Gaza continues, but we are happy to report that the Free Gaza Movement (FGM) successfully challenged the occupation three times since August. FGM voyages from Cyprus to Gaza City brought members of the European Parliament, journalists and activists, as well as much-needed humanitarian supplies into the Gaza Strip. Each time, the Israeli Occupation forces threatened to attack the ships, but in the end let them through. Articles in this edition bring you first-hand accounts of the first voyage, the recent arrest and detention of FGM volunteers and fishermen, and FGM's plans for the future. ISM work in the West Bank continues; the online version of this newsletter includes a journal from a volunteer in Beit Ummar. —Eds

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Rights Advocates Defy Israeli Blockade of Gaza

Cartoon by Carlos Latuff

Free Gaza Heroes Do What Cowardly Governments Dare Not

By Stuart Littlewood, August 2008

Stuart Littlewood hails the heroes of the Free Gaza movement whose boats, manned by volunteers—ordinary people of various nationalities and backgrounds and funded by public donations—succeeded in breaking through the illegal, medieval Israeli naval blockade of Gaza.



Photo Credit: Free Gaza Movement, August 2008

“Whether its gunboats intercepted the voyagers or let them through, it would be a public relations disaster for Israel. And it was.”

A small band of brave, humanitarian-minded volunteers in a couple of boats have done, in the name of human decency, what the cowardly-custard leaders of the US, Britain and the EU, with their mighty navies, were too spineless to do in the name of justice. I’m delighted the Free Gaza boats got through, and thoroughly ashamed to be ruled by a Western mafia that connives with the Middle East’s racial supremacists to blockade and crush the innocent people of Gaza.

The Little People’s courageous voyage from Cyprus called the Israelis’ bluff. To serve its greedy purpose the Zionist entity invented and imposed its own maritime law, which has no basis in international law. So, whether its gunboats intercepted the voyagers or let them through, it would be a public relations disaster for Israel. And it was.

Now the Israeli propaganda machine lashes out to brand the Little People “provocateurs” working for Hamas.

“It’s a Hamas publicity stunt”, claims Israel. The very next day the Israeli News Agency was squealing in panic: “The terror group Hamas tried to stage a media PR event and failed big time.”

Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Arye Mekel told the agency: “We knew about this Hamas attempt to create a PR event at sea for weeks... We knew who’s on these boats and what they contain, and therefore we decided weeks ago to allow them to come into Gaza. They were not carrying weapons and had only a handful of equipment for the hearing impaired.”

So why the Israeli threats and intimidation right up to the last minute?

“One cannot place any responsibility on the Palestinian Authority for these theatrics as the PA has no control of Gaza,” said Mekel, apparently eager to protect Ramallah’s collaborators and vilify the democratically elected and perfectly legitimate resistance movement now holed up in Gaza.

The news agency went on to say that the residents of Gaza were disappointed by the total lack of food that was “supposed to have been brought in by the two Palestine boats carrying international leftist activists ...

who support Hamas suicide bombers and rocket attacks on Israel towns and cities”. According to a ministry spokesperson, they showed “a complete and total disregard for innocent Israeli terror victims”.

The Foreign Ministry said these foreign supporters of Hamas did not deserve to be referred to as “peace activists” and labelled them a “handful of provocateurs seeking a public relations stunt who initiated a political protest aimed at boosting Hamas’s regime of horrors in Gaza”.

The Israeli News Agency and its government masters would have us believe that Prof Jeff Halper (a prominent and much-respected Israeli Jew living in Jerusalem), 81-year-old Catholic nun Anne Montgomery, journalist Lauren Booth, Dr Edith Lutz and the 40 other activists who sailed with noble intention on the SS Free Gaza and SS Liberty were really doing it all for Hamas.

Government officials emphasized, said the agency, that sincere humanitarian groups could continue to provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population. Oh? So how come a van containing 1.5 tons of urgently needed

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Sailing Into Gaza

By Huwaida Arraf, August 2008

On Saturday, after 32 hours on the high seas, I sailed into the port of Gaza City with 45 other citizens from around the world in defiance of Israel's blockade. We traveled from Cyprus with humanitarian provisions for Palestinians living under siege. My family in Michigan was worried sick.

They are not naive. They knew that Israel could have attacked us, as Israeli forces did in 2003, killing nonviolent American witness Rachel Corrie (Editor's note: Corrie, also of the International Solidarity Movement, was run over by a bulldozer operated by Israeli Defense Forces during a protest against the destruction of Palestinian homes; an Israeli military investigation ruled the death accidental) and Brit Tom Hurndall (an ISM representative who died nine months after being shot in the head in Gaza by an IDF sniper; the sniper was convicted of manslaughter) as well as thousands of unarmed Palestinian civilians over the years.

My family members, though, remember that 60 years ago part of our own family was



Huwaida throwing roses into the sea for the sailors on board the USS LIBERTY

Photo Credit: Free Gaza Movement

responded. Governments and civilians alike rallied to help. Yet world governments have witnessed a manmade humanitarian catastrophe unfold before our eyes in Gaza. Karen Koning Abu Zayd, head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), has asserted that "Gaza is on the threshold of becoming the first territory to be intentionally reduced to a state of abject destitution, with

We are saddened for the state of our world when decision-makers can sit back and watch an entire people being slowly and purposefully starved and humiliated.

uprooted and driven from their homes in Palestine by Israeli forces. This loss no doubt fueled my decision to risk my safety and freedom to advance the human rights of innocent men, women and children in Gaza.

Our two boats were greeted upon arrival by thousands of jubilant Palestinians who in 41 years of occupation had never witnessed such a scene. To get there we braved anonymous death threats and the Israeli military interfering with our means of communications despite rough seas that jeopardized our safety. Before our departure, the Israeli foreign ministry asserted its right to use force against our unarmed boats. We nevertheless resolved to act, to symbolically end the siege of Gaza, and to do as civilians what governments have lacked the compassion or courage to do themselves. Once here, we delivered critical supplies such as hearing aids, batteries for medical equipment, and painkillers.

When a massive earthquake rocked China and cyclones ravaged Myanmar, the world

the knowledge, acquiescence and, some would say, encouragement of the international community."

Israel claims that its occupation of Gaza ended three years ago with its pullout of soldiers and settlers. But because Israel objected to the outcome of a 2006 Palestinian election that the Carter Center deemed free and fair, it has blockaded Gaza, severely restricting movement of goods and people. Dov Weisglass, an adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, was quoted shortly before the swearing in of the new Hamas government as saying, "It's like a meeting with a dietitian. We need to make the Palestinians lose weight, but not to starve to death."

More than 200 Palestinians have died in the past year according to Physicians for Human Rights, Israel because they could not exit Gaza for needed medical care. Over 80% of Gaza's population now depends on food aid from UNRWA and the World Food Programme.

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The Stamp in My Passport

Paul Larudee, November 2008

The objective is simple: to assure that Palestinians in Gaza can exercise the same rights and freedoms as all peoples who live on the Mediterranean.

The Lebanese immigration officer came to the last page in my passport. “You went to Israel?” he exclaimed. (Lebanon refuses to admit persons who have entered Israel.)

“No.” I said.

“But it shows here that you entered Gaza.”

“Since when is Gaza in Israel?” I replied. It didn’t compute. How could I enter Gaza without going through Israel?

“Look closer,” I said. “It reads *mina ghazza*—Gaza Port. I didn’t go through Israel. I went by sea.”

The immigration officer could be forgiven for his bewilderment. Fewer than fifty people in the world possessed that stamp in their passport. The two boats of the Free Gaza Movement were the first in forty-one years to enter Gaza from outside. The stamp in my passport was created especially for us.

How did we succeed? What did we accomplish? What has changed, and for whom?

The importance of the achievement of the Free Gaza Movement should be neither over- nor under-emphasized.

It was certainly historic, and banner headline news in a dozen countries. We were the lead story for millions of aljazeera television viewers for four days running. (The coverage in the US was more circumspect.)

It was a triumph of nonviolent resistance. We had defied the fourth most powerful military force on earth with an 81-year-old Catholic nun, an Israeli human rights leader, the rebellious sister-in-law of former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, a bunch of journalists, and seasick volunteers from 17 countries aboard two old wooden tubs rocking across the Mediterranean.

If we could do it, anyone could – anyone at all. We had no special funding or support. It was all grassroots organizing. Our more than 200 endorsers and thousands of supporters could all take credit. The only ones who couldn’t do it were governments or political parties or armed forces. Furthermore, we showed that anyone and everyone could follow in our path.

One key to our success was our complete openness. After two apparent Israeli attempts to interfere with our boat purchases, we procured and prepared the boats in complete secrecy in Greece. When launch time came, however, we invited and encouraged the world to watch. We held news conferences, had journalists on board and stayed in the public eye for all to see. If anything happened to us, it would not go unnoticed.

We also strategically cooperated with friendly authorities and avoided unnecessarily provoking Israel. Although Israel applied pressure upon the Greek and Cypriot governments to stop us, they both responded that our project was perfectly legal, and that they had no right to interfere. With impeccable neutrality, the Cypriot government sent escorts to meet us, led us to a secure area of the Larnaca port, inspected us and our cargo and passengers, and escorted us out again when we were ready.

This assured both us and other concerned parties (especially Israel) that nothing and no one dangerous had been placed on board, although the primary purpose was to assure the Cypriot people of the same. Equally important, from our point of view, it removed any pretext for Israel to stop and board us. In fact, Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson Arye Mekel specifically cited Cypriot assurances as a reason for Israel’s decision not to interfere with our voyage.

We also checked with U.S. authorities

Free Gaza Heroes

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medical supplies donated by the kind folk of Scotland was prevented from entering Gaza for nearly four weeks and had to head back home with its precious cargo still onboard?

The news agency’s report carries a footnote saying it was edited and search-engine optimized by an Israeli communications company that claims on its website “the highest standards of intellect, creativity and integrity”.

You have to laugh. ■

Stuart Littlewood is author of the book Radio Free Palestine, which tells the plight of the Palestinians under occupation. For further information please visit www.radiofreepalestine.co.uk

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before our departure. Were we contravening any laws by accepting an invitation from the democratically elected but Hamas dominated government in Gaza? Were there any prohibitions about meeting with them? “No,” said both the State and Justice departments. Just don’t provide “material support” to them. “No problem,” we said. We don’t support any political parties, whether Hamas or Fateh, Republican or Democrat.

Finally, we made sure that we abided strictly by marine protocol, avoiding Gaza’s borders with Israel and Egypt, and heading directly in from international waters. We even assisted Gaza in creating an official route of entry, issued by the Gaza Port Authority.

When we returned to Cyprus, Israel threatened to stop us if we offered passage to Palestinians. However, we pointed out that they, too, would be subject to Cypriot procedures upon arrival, and that we had to coordinate with Cyprus to assure that all our passengers met their requirements. Again, Israel chose not to interfere.

Since the heady days of August, two more voyages have taken place, on October 29 and November 7, with a newer and stronger boat. Although the former sailed under new threats from Israeli authorities, they once again chose not to follow through. The latter encountered no threats at all.

Did we really break the siege of Gaza? Is Gaza now open by sea?

We think so. Our first voyage, however important and historical, was largely symbolic. We cannot pretend that it improved the lives of Palestinians in any material way. However, each succeeding voyage tests the viability of the sea route and encourages others to follow in our wake.

We intend to follow through on our plans to open a permanent ferry service to Gaza, taking passengers and cargo in both directions. We are encouraging humanitarian relief organizations to stop sending supplies through Israel and send them by sea, so that they will not be subject to costly Israeli restrictions, warehousing and border closures. We are exploring the possibility of a dredger, to make Gaza port suitable for bigger vessels. The objective is simple: to assure that Palestinians in Gaza can exercise the same rights and freedoms as all peoples who live on the Mediterranean.

Beyond that, we are considering an airplane that will fly the same route as the ships, not entering Israeli or Egyptian air space, and landing at the airport that was built in Gaza



soon after the Oslo agreement was signed. How about a couple of hot air balloons inflated in Gaza and floating to Hebron to exercise the right of Palestinians to travel between Gaza and the West Bank?

Sound impossible? Perhaps, but after breaking the siege of Gaza, how do we know what’s impossible anymore? ■

Paul Larudee is one of the organizers of the Free Gaza Movement.

Donations Needed

If you donated after receiving the ISM summer 2008 newsletter, we thank you very much. We covered our printing and mailing costs and more, and remain committed to sending you two newsletters per year for the indefinite future. However, our costs go far beyond the newsletter, so we hope that if you may be able to help again – especially if you were unable to do so last time.

How important is our work? There are lots of worthy appeals to help the victims of Israel’s violations of human rights. However, for every victim that is helped another is created. Human rights work is never as well funded as victim relief, and yet our work is to prevent the creation of victims who then need your relief dollars.

We are currently sponsoring three Bay Area volunteers participating long-term in Palestinian nonviolent resistance with ISM in Gaza, as well as supporting ISM-Palestine with funding and international communications equipment and services. We also participate in national and local activities to educate the American public and support other Palestine solidarity groups.

Please use the donation envelope on page 4/5 to give as generously as you can. *Thank you.*

The Journey Home

Greta Berlin, August 2008

We arrived safely last night. The trip home was much less eventful than the trip to Gaza and much less emotional. On board my boat, the FREE GAZA, was a family of Palestinians who had not been let out of the concentration camp called "Gaza"



Free Gaza Movement ships arriving in Gaza City, August 2008

Photo Credit: Free Gaza Movement

for five years. The mother had given birth to her youngest son four years ago, and the family, living in Cyprus, had not seen him. The joy on the faces of Hana's family was worth waiting the extra half day to leave.

We had to make sure that the Cypriot authorities would allow them in.

On board the LIBERTY was a 10-year-old boy whose leg had been shot off by the Israeli military. He was from Khan Younis. The story (and I haven't been able to verify it yet) is that he was standing with his friend as an Israeli tank invaded his town. A sniper shot him through one leg, then when he stood to run, the sniper shot him through the other one, causing huge damage to the leg. It was amputated at the hip. Again, we had to wait for

Cypriot authorities to give permission for him to transit to another country.

On the first page of the Cyprus Mail is a photo of the boy with Osama, one of our organizers. Even though we came in at 9 pm, the media was all over the quay waiting for us. Although we didn't get seasick this time, many of us, because we are so exhausted, are feeling the land effects today, swaying as we try to walk down the streets.

It has been a week of over-riding joy, sadness at the condition of so many sick and wounded Palestinians, hope for the future, and disbelief that we not only arrived safely but left safely. As we pulled out of Gaza yesterday, seven Israeli naval vessels surrounded the Palestinian fishermen who joyfully escorted us six miles out. The last view we had of Gaza was of the seven gunboats surrounding the fishermen. We've heard from our Israeli sources that they arrested four of them.

As usual, the Palestinians will face the wrath of the Israeli military, because they had egg on their faces and will take it out on the weakest. We meet this morning to plan the second trip. ■

Greta Berlin resides in Los Angeles and is a long-time advocate for justice for the Palestinians. She has been in the occupied West Bank three times in the past six years, and was honored to be onboard the FREE GAZA, the first boat to arrive at the port in Gaza in 41 years. She is one of the founders of the Free Gaza Movement.

Sailing Into Gaza

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Unemployment is up to an astonishing 45%. And hundreds of young people are being intellectually starved by Israel's decision to prevent them from taking up overseas academic opportunities.

Now that we have made it into Gaza, we intend to assist Gaza's fishermen. We will sail with them beyond the six nautical mile limit illegally enforced by the Israeli navy. Palestinian fishermen are routinely harassed and attacked as they ply the waters to eke out a living. We hope our presence will keep the Israeli military at bay.

We do this because we are horrified that this siege of 1.5 million men, women and children is allowed to continue. We are saddened for the state of our world when decision-makers can sit back and watch an entire people

being slowly and purposefully starved and humiliated.

We know that with our two small boats we cannot open all of Gaza to the outside world. We could not bring with us the freedom of movement, access to jobs, medical care, food and other critical supplies that they are denied today. But we brought with us a message to the people of Gaza: they are not alone. With our successful journey we show them that American citizens and others from around the world have been moved to advance humanitarian principles and human rights. Our efforts this week are undertaken in that spirit and with the hope that our elected representatives will one day follow our example. ■

Huwaida Arraf, a human rights advocate from Roseville, is a lecturer at Al-Quds University School of Law in Jerusalem and co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement. This article originally appeared in the Detroit Free Press on August 25, 2008

Kidnapped by the Israeli Navy

By the Editors with contributions from Eva Bartlett, November 2008

On November 18th, fifteen Palestinian fishermen and three international Human Rights Observers (HRO's) were surrounded by the Israeli Navy and taken from their boats seven miles off the coast of Deir al Balah, Gaza Strip. The fishermen and the HRO's were transferred from three separate boats to the Israeli warships and taken to Ashdod, Israel for interrogation. The boats have been confiscated by the Israeli navy and there is no word on whether or when they will be returned to their owners.

The HROs are Andrew Muncie, a Scottish British citizen, Vittorio Arrigoni, an Italian citizen, and Darlene Wallach, an American citizen. They have been volunteering with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) since they entered Gaza on ships with the first Free Gaza Movement voyage on August 23rd, 2008. All internationals have previous experience working with the ISM in the West Bank.

Darlene Wallach, of the Northern California ISM Support Group, is currently being held in a men's prison in Ramle, Israel, in a section reserved for illegal immigrants. Israeli authorities say they will deport Darlene, but will not grant her request to be deported to London, and will instead send her to New York. A judge is expected to make a ruling on her deportation in the next few days.

Since September 2008, after the arrival of the Free Gaza boats, human rights observers with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) have been traveling with Gaza's fishermen, into waters further out than the arbitrarily-imposed six-mile limit. The observers have documented numerous instances of attack at the hands of the Israeli army, from as little as three miles from shore, including being shot at with live ammunition and shelling, being water cannoned—during which soldiers specifically target the boats structural components, particularly breakables like glass, glass panels and machinery—and more recently being doused with a foul, sewage-smelling water shot from the water cannon. The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem has documented testimonies of fishermen who suffered harassment and arrest, had their nets cut, and boats and equipment confiscated, often returned with broken and missing equipment, and costly damages to key boat structures.

When confronted by the Israeli Navy, the boats were seven nautical miles from the shore of Deir al Balah, well within the fishing limit detailed in the Oslo Accords of 1994.

Over 40,000 people in Gaza make a living from the fishing industry, yet this community has been decimated by Israeli restrictions on fishing rights and the prevention of fuel from reaching the Gaza Strip.

According to the Fishing Syndicate in Gaza, fishermen need 40,000 litres of fuel and 40,000 litres of natural gas each day to operate throughout the high fishing season.

Starting in April each year, there is a migration of fish from the Nile Delta to Turkish waters which Palestinian fishermen have traditionally relied upon. Yet Israel limits fishing 6 miles from the Gaza shore and regularly attacks those who venture further than 3 miles—over 70 fishermen were arrested last year by the Israeli forces. The large schools that form the migration are usually found 10 miles from shore. The average catch of fish was over 3000 tons a year in the 1990's, now it is around 500 tons directly due to the Israeli siege of Gaza.

Also, the water in which the fishermen of Gaza sail is now receiving 50 million litres of sewage per day because the people of Gaza have no alternative due to the lack of power supplies to sewage treatment facilities.

For a longer version of this article, see <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article9985.shtml> ■

Eva Bartlett has been active in Canadian ISM support groups, and is currently volunteering in Gaza on a long-term basis.



An Israeli naval ship sprays a Palestinian fishing boat with a water cannon off the coast of the Gaza Strip.

Photo Credit: David Schermerhorn

Thanks to our supporters

The Free Gaza Movement wishes to offer a special thanks to all who supported us in so many ways to make the project a success. Both the project and its success belong to all who contributed and participated and who continue to do so. At present we are at least \$300,000 in debt. Although we believe that sale of the first two boats will cover this amount, your continued help is needed for the future plans of the movement, including a permanent ferry, a professional staff, and (who knows) perhaps an aircraft and some hot air balloons. Both the ISM and the Free Gaza Movement are dedicated to Palestinian nonviolent resistance, but are separate projects. If you wish to donate to both, you can enclose separate checks under each name in the mailer envelope. *Thank you.*

We Await You in Palestine

By Hisham Jamjoum

Each time Palestinians, internationals and Israeli activists join together in acts of non-violent resistance to the occupation of Palestine, it proves the reality of solidarity, and the possibility of coexistence between peoples.

Force is not the language for peace. Unlike the coalition forces who claim to create democracy and global justice through their weapons and destructive technology, in Palestine, simple human beings with empty hands and full hearts face one of the strongest armies in the world, the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF). We won't react towards the IOF by using the same means of violence that they use against us.

We are not teachers or lecturers, but we have the experience of over 60 years of resisting the Israeli Occupation. By our continuous resistance and the hope we have maintained, we prove that force and violence is the weapon of the loser. We need you, our friends, side by side with us, to work for that



peace. We await you in Palestine. ■

Photo: Lisa Nessian

Hisham Jamjoum is an ISM coordinator in Jerusalem.

For more information or to register: www.palsolidarity.org

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