

Breaking the Blockade on Gaza: Lone Humanitarian Vessel Confronts the Egyptian Military Government

By [Prof Michel Chossudovsky](#) and [Julie Lévesque](#)

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The Spirit of Rachel Corrie (officially known as FINCH) carrying a humanitarian cargo to Gaza was attacked by an Israeli naval patrol within the so-called Palestinian Security Zone on May 15, at 10.54pm EDT. The vessel left the Greek Port of Piraeus, on Wednesday, May 11. The humanitarian initiative is sponsored by the Perdana Global Peace Foundation (PGPF), chaired by the former Prime Minister of Malaysia Mahathir Mohamad. The ship is carrying 7.5 kilometers of UPVC (plastic) sewage pipes to help restore the devastated sewerage system in Gaza.

Global Research is a partner with the Perdana Global Peace Foundation's mission. A member of Global Research is on board the ship.

We call upon human rights organizations and Palestinian solidarity organizations Worldwide to take an active position regarding the Spirit of Rachel Corrie.

Support the Spirit of Rachel Corrie's resolve to break the blockade.

What happens in the next few days will be decisive. The objective is to break the Egypt-Israel agreement and open up the border crossings by land and by sea between Egypt and Gaza.

The Spirit of Rachel Corrie Mission will inevitably have a direct bearing on future humanitarian endeavors including the Freedom Flotilla which is scheduled to sail to Gaza in June.

M.. C, Montreal, May 21, 2011

Michel Chossudovsky in Montreal, Julie Lévesque reporting from the Spirit of Rachel Corrie in Egyptian territorial waters.

MONTREAL May 21, 16.09 pm. Global Research. The Spirit of Rachel Corrie is the "lone boat" which has defied the Israeli Navy. On May 15th, the Spirit of Rachel Corrie entered Gaza territorial waters undetected, as part of a humanitarian mission.

The Israeli navy with its advanced communications equipment was taken by surprise, the Israeli navy opened fire using automatic weapons.

This was the first time that a cargo ship entered the so-called "Palestinian Security Zone" since the establishment of the blockade in 2007. THE SHIP ENTERED INTO THE PALESTINIAN SECURITY ZONE, AND WAS WITHIN A MILE FROM THE COAST BEFORE BEING INTERCEPTED.



The Israelis fired to kill. They said it was a warning signal. But one of the crew members was almost killed.

11:09pm EDT, Gaza 6:09am: They are shooting all over the place. We can't continue ... [May 15]

11:35pm EDT, Gaza 6:35am: They circled our ship twice and fired across our ship. Machine guns. No one was injured. One of the fishing nets caught the propeller, so we can't move now. (Satellite text messages to Global Research from the ship)

The Egyptian navy which was in communication with the Israelis escorted the boat into Egyptian territorial waters.

On May 16, immediately following the Israeli attack, the Egyptian authorities came on board, inspected the ship's cargo and documentation and acknowledged the humanitarian nature of the mission.

The boat is now stranded close to the port of Al Arish within 30 km of the Egypt-Gaza border.

The Egyptian authorities have refused to let the boat into the port, despite repeated promises

“We are waiting instructions” from the Egyptian government.

The ship was running out of food, water and fuel. The mission ship informed the port authorities on Wednesday that they would approach the port and attempt to dock, with a view to re-supplying the ship. The Spirit of Rachel Corrie was immediately stopped by the Egyptian Navy.

On Thursday May 20th, the port authorities provided food and water to the crew and passengers and allowed the ship to re-supply. But the ship remains at sea in Egyptian territorial waters. It is prevented from approaching the port of Al Arish or the coastline.

Instructions from Cairo are explicit: the boat will not be allowed to dock and the crew and passengers will not be allowed to set foot on Egyptian soil.

The leader of the Malaysian Mission to Gaza, Matthias Chang has been on a hunger strike since May 19th. The post Mubarak military government in Cairo has refused to send a medical doctor on board.



Matthias Chang on Hunger Strike



The Land Crossing into Gaza

In 2007, Tel Aviv and Cairo reached an agreement regarding the movement of people, aid and trade through the Rafah crossing into the occupied Palestinian territory of Gaza.

With regard to the Spirit of Rachel Corrie, the blockade is being enforced by Egypt on behalf of Israel.

Gaza is a prison. By contributing to enforcing the blockade on Gaza, Egypt is complicit in Israeli war crimes.

Israel controls Palestinian territorial waters, namely the entire Gaza coastline in violation of international law.

The maritime crossing areas from Egyptian territorial waters into the “Palestinian Security zone” are policed by Israel in agreement with Egypt.

This crossing point at Rafah was closed down in June 2007, following the election of the Hamas government. An agreement was reached between Egypt and Israel to enforce the shut down of the Rafah Crossing.

Following the Israeli attack on May 15th, the Spirit of Rachel Corrie Mission has decided to transport the humanitarian cargo by land from the port of Al Ashir through the Rafah border crossing.

According to Israel, humanitarian cargo is allowed to transit through the Rafah crossing but cargo categorized by the Tel Aviv government as “reconstruction” materials is banned, allegedly for security reasons. The 7 km. of plastic tubes for the reconstruction of Gaza’s sewerage system, destroyed by Israeli bombings in December 2009, are classified “reconstruction materials” and would be refused entry by the Israeli authorities.

The ministers of foreign affairs of Egypt and Malaysia will be meeting in Jakarta on Monday with a view to addressing the issue of the Rachel Corrie Mission to Gaza.

The newly appointed Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Nabil El-Arabi (who also holds the position of secretary-general of the Arab League) stated in an interview less than a month ago (28 April 2011) “that Cairo was working to permanently open the Rafah border crossing” between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. “Al-Arabi said that in the coming seven to ten days, moves would be made to end the “blockade and suffering of the Palestinian nation.”

Nabil Al-Arabi’s resolve so far has not been carried out, largely due to pressures on the Egyptian military regime from Washington and Tel Aviv.



Hillary Clinton and Nabil El Arabi

The Rafah border remains closed despite pressures emanating from within Egyptian society. Numerous army checkpoints have been erected on the road towards Rafah:

Convoys carrying activists and aid heading to the Rafah border were turned back at Ismailia on Sunday as hundreds protested in front of the Israeli embassy in Cairo to support the “Third Palestinian Intifada.”

Activists said numerous checkpoints were set up on the road towards Rafah and no one was allowed to pass unless their national ID identified North Sinai as their residence. A number of participants were arrested by the military,

“All convoys were blocked on Friday 13th and Saturday 14th at Al-Salam Bridge and Ahmed Hamdy Tunnel and were forced to turn back by the army. However, we decided to organize a protest in front of the Israeli embassy instead,” said Mohamed Al-Hadary, an activist who was part of the convoy that moved from Tahrir Square on Friday. Daily New Egypt, May 15, 2011)



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