

Free Gaza: Free the Fetters of Mankind

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

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By The moment the slave resolves that he will no longer be a slave, his fetters fall. Freedom and slavery are mental states - Mahatma Gandhi

The rain has ceased for a while. The splendid purples of the heathers are in harmony with the grey of granite and the greens of lichen. Only a few thousand humans share the wide-open spaces of the Dartmoor National Park on this sabbath.

Sleek bodies are being oiled against the Mediterranean sun in Netanya. There is music murmuring from I Pods; there is affluence and even opulence. But beneath the satisfaction there is deep unease.

Thirty miles south-west along that crescent meeting blue-green sea is Gaza. The briefly clad of Netanya fear this as a nest of black snakes seeking gaps beneath the prison fence. They have little knowledge of this untermenschen cooped up within 360 square kilometres and they care even less. The population of this ghetto is 1.5 million, so their lebensraum is 4000 persons per square kilometre compared with Israel's 270 persons per square kilometre. Some are on the beach but wary for another bomb from wherever came the last. There is a strong whiff of black sludge from south of Gaza City. The fishing boats are making off to be corralled within three miles of the shore by the fast patrol boats of the Israeli Navy with sophisticated guns at ready.

There is foreboding in the families of Gaza. It is now 30 months since the medieval siege first started but, as with torture, the screws have been tightened bit by bit. Samid - steadfastness has been the strategy but the determination of Israel to obliterate Hamas has not lessened. This collective punishment as outlawed by the Fourth Geneva Convention has been supported without demur by over forty collaborating nations including perfidious Albion, which set the whole agony in train. The parents are scraping round for pencils and paper ready for the autumn term. It is a source of shame you see if your children are not minimally equipped for school. At the Erez border, Ahmed aged 22 with his undiagnosed anaemia is being interrogated by the Shin Bet. If he wishes to see the Palestinian doctor in the Augusta Victoria hospital in what is left of East Jerusalem then he must be 'tried by ordeal'. Forget international law, he proceeds only if he will tell of the affiliations of his family or undertake to be a stool pigeon on his return to Gaza prison. How long grandfather can we be tortured thus?

Khalil, formerly of Jerusalem, is in the Sinai desert en route to Nuweiba and the ferry to Jordan. The van has broken down. He started out from Edinburgh six weeks ago with 1.5 tons of medical supplies for Gaza. His partner, Linda Willis was with him until two weeks ago. They arrived at the Rafah gate one month ago in a simple but vital expression of their

humanity. Cat and mouse has been the game and the Egyptian mukharabat has held the ring. Egypt is the servant of Israel in this but in step with those same collaborating nations. Entreaties from 9 Members of the Scottish Parliament and separately from the First Minister, Mr Alec Salmond, have fallen on deaf and devious ears. British and Egyptian Embassies have received entreaties but a shameful silence was the only sound.

Inside Gaza at the Al Wafa hospital there are several children on ventilators. The disposable plastic tracheostomy tubes have to be reused by washing them in antiseptic solutions and this risks respiratory infection. A senior physician asked for these tubes to be taken from Scotland to Gaza. The Dove and Dolphin charity transmitted that clear request. Those tubes are being returned with the other vital supplies to Scotland. Tell Blair and Olmert and look in vain for shame.

A large motor launch named after the USS Liberty and a 22 metre yacht called Free Gaza are making way from Crete to Cyprus. There have been delays but about twenty-five crew have waited patiently in Nicosia. They have spent their time in training and communicating so that they hit the sea running when the boats arrive and then head south to Gaza ghetto. The skippers and skeleton crews that took the boats out of the boatyards were joined in Crete by others.

One is a journalist, Lauren Booth. She reports:

“On the 14th of August 2008, an anonymous man called my home in France as my daughters played hide and seek in the garden. This stranger spoke to my husband, warning him that ‘your wife is in great danger. These ships will be blown up.’ My husband asked how it was this person had obtained our private home number. No response was forthcoming, but the illicit threats carried on.” Such threats spew from the Zionist entity or its supporters club as day follows night.

Another is Professor Jeff Halper. He has lobbied and travelled far and wide as head of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition. Seeing temple after temple of the family taken apart by swing shovels as one vicious arm of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the remnants of Palestine has turned his determination from steel to diamond.

“The mission is to break the Israeli siege, an absolutely illegal siege which has plunged a million and a half Palestinians into wretched conditions: imprisoned in their own homes, exposed to extreme military violence, deprived of the basic necessities of life, stripped of their most fundamental human rights and dignity. The siege violates the most fundamental principle of international law: the inadmissibility of harming civilian populations.’

“This is why I, an Israeli Jew, felt compelled to join this voyage to break the siege. As a person who seeks a just peace with the Palestinians, who understands (despite what our politicians tell us) that they are not our enemies but rather people seeking precisely what we sought and fought for – national self-determination, I cannot stand idly aside. I can no more passively witness my government’s destruction of another people than I can watch the Occupation destroy the moral fabric of my own country. To do so would violate my commitment to human rights, the very essence of prophetic Jewish religion, culture and morals, without which Israel is no longer Jewish but an empty, if powerful, Sparta.

“Ordinary people have often played key roles in history, particularly in situations like this where governments shirk their responsibilities. My voyage to Gaza is a statement of

solidarity with the Palestinian people in their time of suffering, but it also conveys a message to my fellow citizens." And he explains why.

And Ramzi Kysia in Nicosia writes 16 August:

"Come, my friends / 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world. / Push off, and sitting well in order smite/ The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds / To sail beyond the sunset." TS Eliot, Ulysses.

Eliza Ernshire from New South Wales:

"No one is paying attention to what's happening in Gaza. No one is listening to Palestinians. They are slowly being strangled by Israel, and no one is even listening. ... We need to find ways to connect people in the Middle East, particularly young people, to people and groups in wealthier countries. Together we can inspire each other, and together we can be much more than we are alone."

U.S. Presidential candidate Barack Obama often speaks about the "audacity of hope." But hope can never be a passive emotion. Centuries ago, St. Augustine wrote that Hope has two, beautiful daughters: Anger and Courage. To hope for a better world is to be angry at the injustices that prevent that world from emerging, and it requires the courage to stand up and create newer worlds for ourselves.

Tom Nelson, a lawyer from Welches, Oregon, is sailing to Gaza to seek that newer world. According to Tom:

"Americans are terribly ignorant of the human effects of what they support. I think this boat is one of the most effective means of raising consciousness - particularly American consciousness - about the problems caused by American 'foreign policy' (author's parentheses). Americans have to know the consequences of these policies ... I'm sixty-four years old, my children are grown, and my affairs are in order.

"I think about Rachel Corrie, and about what Israel may do to us. I know it's risky, but I take a risk when I ride a motorcycle, and I think that if we're really going to change things then somebody has to begin putting something on the line for that change to happen."

The youngest of the crew at 22 is Adam Qvist from Denmark:

"The idea of sailing to Gaza is kind of crazy, but it's also very straight-forward. The whole idea of having just one Palestinian who's been forced off his land and who is able to return to Palestine - this is something that could demolish the whole Zionist venture. And it just has to be one person. If one person can do it, then others can do it. This project, this boat, is about giving people the freedom to take responsibility. You shouldn't expect something from others if you can't do it yourself, and this is true both on a very personal but also on a political level.

"This mission is an amazing opportunity to have a huge impact on this hard-locked, heart-locked, crisis. I've never been to Gaza myself but I know that Gaza is the forgotten little brother of the Middle East, or at least of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Everything about this crisis is clearer in Gaza. The Israeli occupation strategy is much clearer in Gaza, because it's not specifically about taking more land. It's mostly about completely destroying a people."

It is plain these courageous people are passionate humans and that they are not naïve. They will be sailing south from Cyprus in the next few days. An entity with the fourth largest armed forces on our planet will browbeat them with threats. It might use force but it would be unwise to; images can be uploaded to satellites at an instant. They have no arms, no nuclear bombs or thermobaric weapons as used for the assassination of Palestinians in Gaza. But they have principle, will and purpose. May the winds carry them swiftly and safely to the people of Gaza who will crowd on the shores to cheer these sisters and brothers, four of whom are Palestinian.

“. . . For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced. . . . “ Frederick Douglass

David Halpin contributed this article to PalestineChronicle.com.

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