

Israel's Raid of Freedom Flotilla: Turkish Foreign Minister's Speech to UN Security Council

"Civilian mission to provide relief to the children of occupied Gaza"

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Global Research, June 02, 2010

2 June 2010

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [United Nations](#)

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Mr. President.

I appear before you today as a result of a very sad and tragic occasion where one state member of this august house has committed a serious crime in total disregard of all the values we have vowed to uphold since the establishment of the United Nations system.

I am distraught by the fact that the Israeli Defense Forces stormed a multinational, civilian endeavor carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza in international waters, 72 nautical miles off the coast to be exact, killing and wounding many civilians. This action was uncalled for. Israeli actions constitute a grave breach of international law.

In simplest terms, this is tantamount to banditry and piracy. It is murder conducted by a state. It has no excuses, no justification whatsoever. A nation state that follows this path has lost its legitimacy as a respectful member of the international community.

The multinational civilian flotilla composed of a few ships and a total of around 600 people from 32 countries, carrying humanitarian aid to the impoverished Gaza was unlawfully ambushed early today. The sole aim of this civilian mission was to provide much needed relief to the children of occupied Gaza who have been under illegal and inhumane Israeli blockade for years. The ships were hardly a threat to the State of Israel or any other state for that matter. Humanitarian aid was on its way to children who have been stripped of their opportunities to live as children and enjoy all the basic amenities that your and our children take for granted. These children do not know where their next meal is coming from. They either have no shelter or live in extremely deprived conditions. They receive no education; they have no future where they can contribute to a peaceful and stable Palestine and region.

Mr. President,

The ships carry amenities and facilities such as playgrounds that would remind the children of their childhoods. They carry very basic needs like cancer medication and milk powder to enhance child growth and health in the absence of milk proper. The international community has been a witness to this humanitarian tragedy for years, failing to act. And today this is where we are. Today we have observed through live coverage an act of barbarism where provision of humanitarian aid has been punished through aggression in high seas, 72 miles from international waters.. Today many humanitarian aid workers go back in bodybags. And

Israel has blood on its hands. This is not off the coast of Somalia or in the archipelagos of the Far East where piracy is still a phenomenon. This is the Mediterranean where such acts are not the norm. This is where we need common sense. This is where civilization has emerged and flourished and where the Abrahamic religions took root. These are religions that preach peace and teach us to extend our hands when others are in need.

The use of force was not only inappropriate, but also disproportionate. International law dictates that even in wartime, civilians are not to be attacked or harmed. The doctrine of self-defense does not in any way justify the actions taken by the Israeli forces. High-seas freedoms constitute one of the most basic rights under international law of the sea, including customary international law. Freedom of navigation is one of the oldest forms of international norms, dating back centuries. No vessel can be stopped or boarded without the consent of the captain or the flag state. The law permitting such action in exceptional cases is clearly stated. Furthermore, any suspected violation of law on the part of the vessel and its crew on the high seas does not absolve the intervening state of its duties and responsibilities under applicable international law. To treat humanitarian aid delivery as a hostile act and to treat the aid workers as combatants is a reflection of a dangerous state of mind, with detrimental effects to regional and global peace. Therefore, the Israeli actions cannot be deemed legal or legitimate. Any attempt to legitimize the attack is futile.

Mr. President,

This unacceptable action was perpetrated by those who in the past had taken advantage of ships carrying refugees and those escaping one of the worst tragedies of the last century. They should be more aware than most of the importance of humanitarian assistance, of the dangers and inhumanity of ghettos as the one we currently witness in occupied Gaza.

I am proud to be representing a nation that in the past has helped those in need and escaping extermination.

After the act of aggression, I have heard official statements claiming that the civilians on the ships were members of a radical Islamist group. It saddens me to see that officials of a state stoop so low as to lie and struggle to create pretexts that would legitimize their illegal actions. However, the flotilla consists of citizens of 32 countries. All of them civilians, representing many faiths; Christianity, Islam, Judaism and people from all creeds and backgrounds. It represents the conscience of the international community. It is a model of the United Nations. Therefore, this was an attack on the United Nations and its values. The international system has suffered a sharp blow and now it is our responsibility to rectify this and prove that common sense and respect to international law prevails. We must be able to show that use of force is not an option unless clearly stated in law. We must uphold our commitments and punish those who are in contradiction. The system must be set right. Otherwise the trust of the people in the system, in their leaders, in us will be demolished.

No state is above the law. Israel must be prepared to face the consequences and be held accountable for its crimes.

Under the conditions, any slim chance that existed regarding peace and stability in the region has suffered a serious setback. The processes in place have been suffocated by this one single act. It seems as if Israel has gone the extra mile in order to negate any positive developments and hopes for the future. They have become advocates of aggression and use

of force. In view of all these, today, I call on the people of Israel to express their dismay regarding this wrong doing. They must not allow another blatant action to once again present Israel as an aggressor. They must take steps to reinstate their status as a credible partner and responsible member of the international community.

Turkey would like to see that the Security Council strongly reacts and adopts a Presidential Statement today strongly condemning this Israeli act of aggression, demanding an urgent inquiry into the incident and calling for the punishment of all responsible authorities and persons. I call on this Council to step up and do what is expected of it.

We hereby expect for the following to be included in the decision.

- Israel must apologize to the international community and to the families of those who have been killed and wounded in the attack. - An urgent inquiry must be undertaken.
- Appropriate international legal action must immediately be taken against the authorities responsible for and perpetrators of this aggression.
- A severe sense of disappointment and warning must be issued by the United Nations. Israel must be urged to abide by international law and basic human rights.
- The countries concerned must be allowed to retrieve their deceased and wounded immediately.
- The ships must be expressly released and allowed to deliver the humanitarian assistance to its destination.
- The families of the deceased, wounded, NGO's and shipping companies concerned must be compensated to the full extent.
- The blockade of Gaza must be ended immediately and all humanitarian assistance must be allowed in.
- Gaza must be made an example by swiftly developing it, to make it a region of peace. The international community must be invited to contribute.

Mr. President, This is a black day in the history of humanity where the distance between terrorists and states has been blurred. Anyone that stands in the way of reestablishing dignity and respect of the international world order will have to answer to the world public opinion.

It is incumbent upon us to show that all states are bound by international law and human values. Turkey is prepared to shoulder its responsibility in this regard. I am sure that this is our common goal.

In ending, I salute all humanitarian workers who endeavor to provide relief. They are the people in the front lines. I present my condolences to the families of those who gave their lives in this pursuit whatever their background, their religion or ethnicity. I share their grief.

According to our Abrahamic tradition and my belief, killing one human being is killing humanity as a whole. Yesterday humanity drowned in the international waters of the Mediterranean.

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