

Justice for the People of Gaza: Gaza Fever

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“You Need a Proper Boat ... ”

We’ve all caught the fever, every one of us who works to send boats to Gaza. From August 2006, when a handful of us started the Free Gaza Movement, every one who has joined us has been stricken with a bad case of the disease. It is chronic. It sometimes causes afflicted patients to insist that if just one more voyage can be planned to this small slice of the Mediterranean, we’ll all be in remission. There is no real cure in sight... yet.

Gaza Fever has now attacked thousands of us who have a passionate sense of justice.

The disease began shortly after Israel invaded Lebanon in 2006, as a group of us were in despair that the Palestinians, once again, were the forgotten symptom of Israel’s grand designs. As the world watched the defeat of Israel by a small band of guerrilla fighters in Lebanon, Israel decided it would take its wrath out on the Palestinians, specifically the Palestinians of Gaza. We watched as Israel, in January 2009, deliberately bombed 1.5 million Palestinians into abject poverty, a man-made catastrophe bordering on genocide.



Azbet, Jabalia in Gaza (January 2009): The devastation stretches as far as the eye can see. The estimate is that 6,000-8,000 houses in Gaza damaged, and 5,000 completely destroyed.

One man in Australia suggested we sail a boat from New York to Gaza in protest of the closures there. That small idea has grown into a flotilla that leaves at the end of May with

700 people on board nine ships.

We, who have traveled by boat to Gaza, come back changed, blisters of outrage forever marking us. Those who have supported us through donations, letters, outraged picketing in front of Israeli Embassies demanding Israel stop its war crimes against a civilian population are also changed, as they watched our small boats sail into Gaza five times, cheering us on our way. Then, when our last three missions were violently stopped by Israel, thousands stepped up and donated to help us buy new boats.



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Previous voyages by the Free Gaza Movement to Break the Siege on Gaza and Deliver Humanitarian Aid

In July 2009, Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia, and his wife, Tun Dr. Siti Hasmah bin Mohamad visited the Free Gaza Movement in Cyprus. They had heard about the voyages to Gaza and what Israel had done to the last three, ramming the Dignity, turning one back under threat of fire and hijacking the Spirit of Humanity, kidnapping the 21 human rights observers and throwing them into detention for a week.

He wanted to come and see for himself the small fishing boat that had been, in August 2008, Free Gaza's first vessel to enter the port of Gaza in 41 years. When he and his wife stepped on this small vessel, he was shocked. "You went all the way to Gaza on this small boat? You braved the sea in a boat that was barely seaworthy?"



Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, taking a look at the first boat to reach Gaza, together with members of the Perdana Global Peace Organisation (Dr. Zulaiha Ismail and Ram Karthigasu).

When we replied that, indeed, we had crossed the sea in not only this small boat, but one even smaller, 44 of us challenging Israel's blockade on the 1.5 million Palestinians of Gaza, he caught Gaza Fever.

"You need a proper boat," he said. "I'm going back to my people in Malaysia and see how we can help you raise money to send more boats back to Gaza."

And that's exactly what he and his wife did.



Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad and Tun Dr. Siti Hasmah with members of the Free Gaza Movement (from left: Huwaida Arraf, Derek Graham, and Greta Berlin).

They went back to their citizens and, through the Perdana Global Peace Organization, helped to raise over €300,000 for the Free Gaza to purchase a cargo ship and two passenger boats. These are the boats we are sailing to Gaza beginning mid-May.

And when the Irish cargo boat sailed out of Dundalk, it was because of the passion for justice that Tun Dr. Mahathir and his wife, Tun Dr. Siti Hasmah have for the occupied Palestinians and the determination of the members of the Free Gaza Movement.

Malaysia and Ireland and the people who represent this mission embody civil society at its best.

Now our four boats will rendezvous in the Mediterranean with boats from the European Campaign to End the Siege of Gaza (ECESG), Insani Yardim Vakfi (IHH), Ship to Gaza Greece, Ship to Gaza Sweden, and the International Committee to Lift the Siege on Gaza.

We're named the Freedom Flotilla and we sail to deliver reconstruction supplies, paper, medical equipment and toys for the children. The fever has spread to other organizations and other countries.



Matthias Chang drapes the Malaysian flag over the side of the cargo ship loaded with humanitarian aid. Also, present (next to Matthias, in green windbreaker) is former UN Assistant Secretary-General Denis J. Halliday, who is also part of the International Advisory Panel of Perdana Global Peace Organisation, and a signatory of the Kuala Lumpur Initiative to Criminalise War.



Will there be a cure?...only if their fishermen can fish without being shot and murdered, only if their farmers can harvest their crops without Israeli military vehicles burning down their wheat, only if Gaza has the same rights as every country on the Mediterranean... the right to free and open trade with the rest of the world.

Then and only then will our severe case of Gaza Fever be cured.

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