

Survivor Testimonies From Flotilla 31 May 2010

By [The Free Gaza Movement](#)

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For three days as they were held in captivity and unable to speak on their own behalf, Israel presented the massacre against civilian passengers on the Mavi Marmara as self defense against a “lynching.” Now that the passengers are returning to their home nations, the global community is hearing a much different story, not just regarding the incident but also their treatment afterwards once in custody.

Aboard the Mavi Marmara

Iara Lee

Brazilian Filmmaker (based in San Francisco)

“(The attack) was a surprise, because it happened in the middle of the night, in the darkness, in international waters, because we knew there would be a confrontation but not in international waters. Their first tactic was to cut all of our satellite communications and then they attacked. All I witnessed first hand was the shooting. They came on board and started shooting at people.”

“We expected them to shoot people in the legs, to shoot in the air, just to scare people, but they were direct,” “Some of them shot in the passengers’ heads. Many people were murdered - it was unimaginable.”

Norman Paech

Retired German Parliamentarian and Professor

“We had not prepared in any way to fight. We didn’t even consider it because we knew very well that we would have absolutely no chance against soldiers like this.”

“The Israeli government justifies the raid because they were attacked. This is absolutely not the case.”

Inge Hoeger

German Parliamentarian

“We felt like we were in a war, like we were being kidnapped.” “Nobody had a weapon.”

Annette Groth

German Parliamentarian

“The Israeli claim that its commandos acted in self-defence was ‘ridiculous’”.

“It was like war,” “They had guns, Taser weapons, some type of teargas and other weaponry, compared to two-and-a-half wooden sticks we had between us. To talk of self-defence is ridiculous.”

“The scandal is that we have to fight the Israeli images only with words.,” The Israelis confiscated all the activists’ cameras, computers, and mobile phones.

Sarah Colborne

United Kingdom

“The Israeli forces handcuffed members of the activists’ medical team who were sent to help treat the injured. It was terrifying...If you talked they pointed a gun at you.”

“We wrote a sign in Hebrew saying, ‘SOS! Need medical assistance. People are dying. Urgent’ Hanin Zoabi, who’s a Knesset member, an Israeli Knesset member, took that sign to the front—to the back of the boat, where the soldiers were pointing at her. They ordered her to go back.”

Haneen Zuaby

Minister, Israeli Knesset

“The Israeli navy fired on the ships five minutes before commandos descended from ropes that dangled from helicopters. “

The Israeli-Arab legislator said Israeli forces ignored her when she said that they should treat two gravely injured people, who later bled to death.

Matthias Gardel

Acclaimed Swedish Academic

“People were not allowed to go to the lavatories – they were made to soil their clothes.” Gardel was especially horrified by witnessing the experience of a badly wounded man in his late 50s, who the Israeli troops forced to remain on the open deck. “Suddenly, his right eye exploded in a gush of blood – and a blob of something fell out of it.”

Jamal El-Shayyal

Journalist from Al Jazeera

“...as this attack started I was on the top deck and within just a few minutes there were live shots being fired from above the ship from above from where the helicopters were.”

“The first shots that were fired were some sort of sound grenades. There was some tear gas that was fired as well as rubber coated steel bullets. They were fired initially and the live bullets came roughly about five minutes after that, after those initial shots were fired.”

“There was definitely fire from the air because one of the people who was killed was clearly shot from above. He was...the bullet targeted him at the top of his head. There was also fire coming from the sea as well. Most of the fire initially from the sea was tear gas canisters and sound grenades. But then it became live fire.”

“There is no doubt from what I saw that live ammunition was fired before any Israeli soldier was on deck.”

(From the top deck,) “you could almost see the soldiers pointing their guns down through some sort of hole or compartment at the bottom side of the helicopter, firing almost indiscriminately without even looking where they were firing and those bullets were definitely live bullets.”

“There was a Knesset member who approached the Israeli soldiers saying we have injured, she was saying they have injured people, please come and take them. Yet the Israelis refused. Three hours later all three of those people that were injured ended up dying on the spot because no one came to take them.”

Aboard the Free Mediterranean

Michalis Grigoropoulos (Greek)

Crewman

“Commandos were already using teargas and firing live ammunition as they hit the deck.” “We did not resist at all, we couldn’t even if we had wanted to.” “They then used electroshock weapons on some activists,”

While in custody in Israel, “two Greek activists were beaten up.”

Aboard the Challenger I

Huwaida Arraf

American, Free Gaza Chair

“They started beating people. My head was smashed against the ground and they stepped on my head. They later cuffed me and put a bag over my head. They did that to everybody.”

On custody: “I asked them to at least give (my personal belongings) back to me, and they refused and forced me into a police van, literally, by pulling me up by my hair and my hands and feet and beating me in order to get me into the van. They drove me out of the port, stopped the car at some point—I’m not sure where because I was a little bit disoriented after being punched in the face and the jaw, and then they just opened the door and threw

me out of the van.” “I think I must have passed out for a little bit, because the next thing I knew there was a medic taking me into an ambulance. I was taken to a hospital and checked and released just a few hours later.”

Alex Harrison

UK Activist

“We saw the helicopter come down and we heard the beginnings of the opening of live fire. I didn’t fully take in that they were using live fire. ..but it began to sink in that (that they were using) live fire.”

Referring to her boat “Two women were hooded, they had their eyes taped.” The Israelis used rubber bullets, sound bombs and tasers against them.”We stood and tried to obstruct the armed, masked men and maintained no other defence and still they used violence.”

Fiachra O Luain

Ulsterman (Ireland)

Dual American citizenship

I was “brutalized” while in custody in Ben Gurion airport and had bruises all around his body as a result.

“As soon as one of them grabbed me, about 15 or 20 jumped me, kicked me, punched me as soon as I hit the ground,” “They had my arm in stress positions, they tried to break my finger.” He said he feared for his life during his time in custody and at one stage asked to see a Rabbi. “I asked to see a Rabbi and they told me I would only see a Rabbi when they killed me .

“I saw what they did. I was on the bow of the Challenger 1 and there was live gunfire straight away from below and from the helicopters. One of the men was shot in the head. Another man was shot with a bullet right between his eyes at point blank range.”

Dr. Fintan Lane

Ireland

“When they boarded our boat, we resisted entirely peacefully. I sat on the floor and tried to reason with them, but the Israeli commandos physically attacked us. Fiachra Ó Luain (see above) was dragged around the ground and I had a gun pointed in my face by a screaming commando. His mania was so intense that I genuinely feared for my life.”

On treatment during custody: “I would not cooperate with my illegal detention (by handing over my passport) so I was then physically assaulted, my arms were painfully twisted behind my back for prolonged periods. Ken O’Keefe, the Irish-American passenger, suffered a severe beating at the hands of security officials at Tel Aviv airport before boarding, and his injuries were so bad that he had to be hospitalised in Tel Aviv.”

Shane Dillon

Ireland

“Israelis had used stun guns, tasers, assaulted people with the butt ends of rifles, pushed people to the ground and stood on them.”

There was a screening system and electronic detectors onboard the largest boat in the flotilla, the Mavi Marmara, to check its passengers for weapons. “Any of the weapons I have seen demonstrated by the Israeli defence forces were typical equipment that you would have on a ship,”

“There was a knife for a galley. They also showed a sledgehammer, which would be on a merchant vessel for anchor cables etc. (Kate) Geraghty, an award-winning photographer, was set upon despite explaining she was an accredited member of the press.” She was just doing her journalistic duties. She advised them she was a bona fide photographer. She was just attacked.”

Kate Geraghty

Irish (living in Australia)

The Israeli attack was “pretty full on.” “It (the Taser attack) hurt and it made me feel sick.’

Geraghty had been trying to send out photographs before the boat she was on was taken over. Once the commandos boarded the vessel, one of their first acts was to seize all communication equipment, cameras and memory cards.

Aboard the Sfendoni

Janet Kobren

Retired Math Teacher (American, Jewish)

Regarding custody: “It was a long ordeal, very uncomfortable.” We “occasionally saw passengers beaten by the Israelis before they were put on the planes.”

Gene St. Onge

American Structural Engineer

“This was not peacefully. I was kicked in the head.... As the commandos jumped on the ship we attempted to protect the wheelhouse and the captain. We were able to crowd the inside of the captain’s quarters. I was unable to because I was trying to protect another part of the boat. By the time I got there I noticed that the captain was being pulled and hit. He sustained rather serious injuries although I guess he’s going to be alright. He had a punctured ear drum, a neck injury and a back injury. In the mean time, as I tried to get in I was thrown on the deck a couple times. One of my new friends, who I made many on this trip, Mehdi, a Libyan Arab living in Europe was hit with the butt end of a rifle, in his right eye. He fell to the deck. He was writhing in pain, trying to get away, but he was continually being kicked. When I saw that, I tried to get to him. I was screaming “Leaving him alone!” I kept getting pushed back. Finally I tried to get over to try to cover him. At that point I was hit with the rifle or something. I was bleeding. And I was restrained with handcuffs.”

Aboard the Sophia

Henning Mankell

Best-Selling Swedish Novelist

"We saw these black rubber boats coming with masked commando soldiers ... they climbed aboard. They were very aggressive ... there was an older man in the crew, he was perhaps a little slow and they shot him in the arm with an electric gun which is very, very painful ... they shot another man with rubber bullets."

The soldiers checked the boat and one soon returned saying they had found weapons. "I have 24 witnesses to this, he showed me my razor, a one-time use razor, and a box cutter he'd found in the kitchen," "All my possessions were taken. They stole my camera, my telephone ... even my socks."

"I think the Israeli military went out to commit murder." "If they had wanted to stop us they could have attacked our rudder and propeller, instead they preferred to send masked commando soldiers to attack us. This was Israel's choice to do this."

Dror Feiler

Israeli-born Sweden Artist

Feiler said that he had tried to talk with the Israeli soldiers on board the ship but was beaten up.

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