

# The Free Gaza Movement

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We all remember the brutal Israeli attacks against Gaza last year. Many of us were outraged by the killings of some 1,300 Gazan Palestinian, men, women, the disabled, the children, the sick and the maimed. Hospitals and schools were destroyed.

The condemnation of this brutal assault had forced the Israelis to stop the massive retaliation against alleged Hamas rocket attacks against Israel.

Many of the rich countries pledged billions in aid for the rebuilding of Gaza.

After that, things became quiet. There was hardly any report in the press on what was happening. I suppose most people assume that the reconstruction of Gaza was proceeding apace.

But the reality is far different. The Egyptians limited the medicine and the building materials from entering Gaza from its territory. The sea is blockaded illegally by the Israelis. The people of Gaza have literally been made prisoners by these actions.

The Free Gaza Movement led by Huwaida Arraf was set up in order to send needed supplies to beleaguered Gaza. But after five small boats were successful in delivering much needed supplies, the Israeli navy began to intercept them and forcing them to abort their humanitarian aid.

One small boat with a number of Palestinians, Arabs, European and American (a U.S. Congresswoman) was rammed by Israeli warships. The people in the boat, all civilians were thrown into the sea. Luckily they survived.

Recently another little boat, loaded with food, medicine, stationery for school use and toys, with 25 unarmed civilians including a Nobel Peace Laureate from Ireland and the American women candidate for presidency of the U.S. was fired at by Israeli commandos, who then boarded the boat, giving rough treatment to the people on board.

Repeated shouts on the loudhailer that there were only unarmed civilians and the boat carried no arm failed to stop the commandos. The boat was steered by the commandos to an Israeli port and the people on board were thrown into Israeli jails.

The people of the Free Gaza Movement have now been released. They are determined to carry on sailing from Cyprus to Gaza to bring relief.

Winter is coming and it will be bitterly cold in Gaza. A great number of the Gazans whose houses were destroyed by the Israelis have no shelter and would suffer terribly in the

winter.

Modern civilization is supposedly very concerned about human rights. It is only right that we care for those heroes and heroines who are standing up to oppressive Governments.

But shouldn't we also be concerned and caring for the 1½ million people of Gaza, who had lost 1,300 fellow inhabitants, whose houses, schools and hospitals have been destroyed, who do not have water or sanitary facilities, who will be without shelter from the coming winter.

It is sad that Governments who had pledged aid have so readily allowed the Israelis to blockade Gaza. It is disgusting that Israel can break international laws with impunity.

I went to Cyprus to meet these brave members of the Free Gaza Movement. I was shocked at how tiny was the only fishing boat that they still have for future trips to Gaza.

I had been sailing in a much bigger yacht and I know how rough was the sea. Yet 25 people dare to sail in this tiny boat, sleeping on the open deck, being seasick, being without proper food, and being made to face Israeli attacks. We really live in an uncivilized world where the fate of one or two people, useful for condemning certain Governments are constantly played up, yet the suffering, the freedom of 1½ million Gazans are ignored. I admire the Gazans whose main concern is for their right to be a free people, free that is from Israeli oppression, supported by the rich people who talk a lot about human rights and freedom.

I don't think I would be able to endure the kind of discomfort and dangers faced by the activists of the Free Gaza Movement. All I can do is to give moral support to them.

Malaysians who wish to do so may volunteer to sail with these intrepid people. But if they cannot, then they can contribute towards their need to buy a bigger boat as no one would rent boats to them.

*The PGPO (Perdana Global Peace Organisation) would like to appeal for donations in aid of the Free Gaza Movement members to purchase a small ship to carry cement and building materials apart from medicine and food etc.*

*All contributions by cheque can be issued to: KLFCW (Gaza Fund). KLFCW stands for the Kuala Lumpur Foundation to Criminalise War. The cheques can be addressed to the KLFCW c/o Perdana Global Peace Organisation, 5th Floor, 88, Jalan Perdana, Taman Tasik Perdana, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Cash contributions can be channeled to KLFCW Maybank Account: 5123 3430 6634.*

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