

## To Gaza with Dignity

By [Eric Walberg](#)

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*The drama now playing out on the high seas off the coast of Gaza has captured the world's hearts,*

The tiny Dignité/Karama, sailing under a French flag, left Corsica on 25 June, and has been chugged along for the past weeks mostly in Greek waters. Its last stop was the Greek island Kastellorizo on Saturday, after which it headed south. The 16 passengers onboard view themselves as representatives of the entire Freedom Flotilla II: Stay Human. The rest of the Flotilla's ships have all been detained in Greek ports, some sabotaged, others on technicalities, and when that failed — the withdrawal of their flags.

According to Greta Berlin of the Free Gaza Movement (FGM), the Dignité was only allowed to leave Kastellorizo when it told Greek coastguard officials it was heading for Alexandria, Egypt, not Gaza. By Sunday night, it was nearing the Egyptian city of Port Said but came to a stop and then changed course, heading for Gaza after all. The captain, Zacharia Stylianakis, decided that Egypt's political turmoil making a visit there unadvisable, that it was perfectly legal to go to Gaza, so why not?

By Tuesday morning it was 50 miles away from the Gaza Strip when an Israel Navy ship started trailing the yacht and threatened to attack it if it entered the blockaded waters. Soon three gunboats were surrounding it.

The delegates on board include French Communist Party firebrand Jacqueline Le Corre, ex-Euro parliamentarian Jean Claude Lefort, as well as representatives of the stymied Canadian, French, Greek and Swedish Flotillers. Israeli journalist Amira Hass, is reporting for *Haaretz*, and there is a team from Al-Jazeera TV.

Hass is author of *Drinking the Sea at Gaza* (1999), a heart-wrenching account of Gazan society from the late 1980s through the mid-1990s. She lived in and reported from Gaza during the 1990s and now lives in the West Bank city of Ramallah. Her book recounts the 1948 expulsion and flight to Gaza, and how village structures and traditions were reconstructed in the crowded camps of Gaza. "Even if most Gazan refugees are now ready to accept the political consequences of losing their land, emotionally they will always see the villages as home."

That the Dignité chose Kastellorizo, in the far east of the Greek archipelago near the Turkish mainland, as its launch pad to break the siege is no coincidence. Many Kastellorizans fled the Nazis during WWII, finding refuge in Gaza. The present mayor of the island, Paul Panigiris, was born in Gaza, and he and his fellow islanders are staunch supporters of their besieged brothers. Their support for the Dignité was no doubt an important factor in

“convincing” the Greek official to let it proceed.

The Dignité is not just the remnant of Freedom Flotilla 2, as depicted in the mass media, but a first wave of others according to the FGM. “It is a message to the Israeli government, to the international community and to the besieged people of Gaza: The Free Gaza Movement and the coalition of Freedom Flotilla II are not giving up until the inhumane and illegitimate blockade of Gaza is lifted.”

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Canadian Eric Walberg is known worldwide as a journalist specializing in the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. A graduate of University of Toronto and Cambridge in economics, he has been writing on East-West relations since the 1980s. He has lived in both the Soviet Union and Russia, and then Uzbekistan, as a UN adviser, writer, translator and lecturer. Presently a writer for the foremost Cairo newspaper, Al Ahram, he is also a regular contributor to Counterpunch, Dissident Voice, Global Research, Al-Jazeera and Turkish Weekly, and is a commentator on Voice of the Cape radio. Eric Walberg was a moderator and speaker at the Leaders for Change Summit in Istanbul in 2011.

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