

# Refusing to be Intimidated

**Ramzi Kysia**

Categories:  
Nonviolent Resistance Acts  
palestine

Yesterday, organizers from the Gaza Freedom March, Free Gaza Movement, and Code Pink voluntarily made ourselves available for arrest in Rep. Brad Sherman's offices on Capitol Hill. RT Television covered our attempt to 'surrender' ourselves, and activist videos of the action are now up on YouTube.

Congressman Brad Sherman (D-CA), chair of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on terrorism, has publicly called for the arrest and prosecution of "any U.S. citizens who were aboard or involved with the Freedom Flotilla" under the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. According to Rep. Sherman: "[It's] absolutely illegal for any American to give food, money, school supplies, paper clips, concrete ...so I will be asking the Attorney General to prosecute any American involved in what was clearly an effort to give items of value to a terrorist organization."

Sherman has also stated that he is planning on working with the Department of Homeland Security to make sure all non-U.S. citizens aboard the flotilla would be permanently barred from entering the U.S. This list includes Nobel peace laureate Mairead Maguire, former UN assistant secretary general Denis Halliday, as well as a number of parliamentarians and government officials from Ireland, Britain, Spain, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Palestine, and Israel.

Sherman isn't alone. A great number of our elected officials - both 'liberals' and 'conservatives' - have come out strongly in support of the Israeli massacre of civilian aid and human rights workers aboard the Mavi Marmara. Nor are these governmental attempts at intimidation limited to the United States. An effort is underway to lobby the Canadian government to designate the Turkish charity IHH as a 'terrorist group.' This follows similar campaigns in the U.S. to criminalize charities such as Holyland Trust and LIFE for Relief and Development. Ghassan Elashi and four other aid directors are currently serving a 65 year sentence in U.S. federal prison for "supporting" Hamas in the form of humanitarian aid. Although attempts to prosecute the Michigan-based LIFE for Relief and Development for 'terrorism' were ultimately unsuccessful, these and other similar actions by government officials have created a dangerous climate of fear in North America.

Donations to charities with an Islamic or Middle-Eastern focus have significantly faltered because ordinary citizens are frightened their government will prosecute them for 'aiding terrorism' - even if that 'aid' is simply in the form of food and medicine being given to populations in dire need.

In Israel, these attacks on civil society have gone so far as to try to criminalize Israeli human rights organizations for documenting Israeli governmental abuses in the West Bank and Gaza. These witch hunts are extending even into the Israeli Knesset. Haneen Zoubi, a member of the Knesset and just one of several parliamentarians aboard the Freedom Flotilla, is currently facing an organized campaign to strip her of her citizenship, as well as open death threats, simply for being aboard the Marmara and attempting to deliver aid to besieged Gaza.

Although Congressman Sherman chose not to have us arrested at his office yesterday, he has not retracted his statements. The threat of possible future prosecution looms over all of the passengers and organizers behind the worldwide campaign to overcome the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. This threat is deliberate. Whether we are ever arrested or not, its intent is to frighten people away from any type of activism involving Muslim populations - whether that activism be 'political' or even simply humanitarian.

We cannot allow this intimidation to continue. We must not allow it to continue. A generation ago few could have imagined that the U.S. government would openly be arresting people without charge, and imprisoning them indefinitely without trial - often on 'secret evidence' that they are not allowed to see, and even when other evidence exists proving their innocence. Yet this is happening. A generation ago no one would have believed that government officials would openly argue in favor of torture, or of a supposed 'right' of the President to execute anyone he designates as a 'terrorist,' including U.S. citizens, without any judicial oversight or hope for appeal. But it is happening.

If we don't take a stand, now, and take direct action commensurate with the multiple crises facing our world today - our children may find themselves living in a nation little different from Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

After Israeli commandos massacred 9 civilian aid and human rights workers aboard the Marmara, including kicking and executing a Turkish-American teenager while he lay helpless on the ground, MK Zoubi observed that: "Israel had days to plan this military operation. They wanted many deaths to terrorize us and to send a message that no future aid convoys should try to break the siege of Gaza."

Israel will not be successful. We will return to Gaza. We will sail again and again and again, until the siege is forever shattered and Palestine has free access to the rest of the world.

If our government wants to put us in jail for trying to help people in need, so be it. We won't be intimidated.

Ramzi Kysia is an Arab-American writer and organizer with the Free Gaza Movement



---

ShareThis