

MERCY SHIP DEPARTS FOR GAZA: "WE ARE COMING IN ON TUESDAY"

Written by Free Gaza Movement
Monday, 12 January 2009 15:43 -

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Cyprus, 11 January 2009) - The Free Gaza Movement ship, "SPIRIT OF HUMANITY," left Larnaca Port at 3:00 pm, Monday, 12 January, on an emergency mission to besieged Gaza. It is expected to arrive in Gaza at approximately 11am (UST) Tuesday morning. Aboard the ship are 36 passengers and crew, representing 17 different nations. They are doctors, journalists, human rights workers, and five European parliamentarians representing Belgium, Greece, Italy, and Spain (see below for a complete passenger list). The mercy ship also carries desperately needed medical supplies meant for hospitals in the Gaza Strip.

www.FreeGaza.org

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For More Information, Please Contact:

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This voyage marks Free Gaza's second attempt to break through the blockade since Israel began attacking Gaza on 27 December. Between August and December 2008, the Free Gaza Movement successfully challenged the Israeli blockade five times, landing the first international ships in the port of Gaza since 1967.

The Israeli military violently attacked an earlier attempt by the Free Gaza Movement to send an emergency boat filled with doctors and medical supplies to Gaza. In the early hours of Tuesday, 30 December, the Israeli navy deliberately, repeatedly, and without warning rammed the unarmed ship, the DIGNITY, causing significant structural damage and endangering the lives of its passengers and crew. The DIGNITY found safe harbor in Lebanon, and is currently awaiting repairs.

Shortly before the SPIRIT OF HUMANITY left Cyprus today, the Cypriot authorities informed the Free Gaza Movement that the Israeli government had officially contacted their embassy in Tel Aviv, and warned them that they felt "justified" in using "any means available" to forcibly prevent the mercy ship from arriving in Gaza. At the request of the ship's organizers, the Cypriot authorities searched the ship prior to its departure to certify that it only carried medical supplies.

Fouad Ahidar, a member of the Belgian Parliament sailing to Gaza aboard the SPIRIT OF HUMANITY, responded to concerns that Israel may attack the unarmed ship by saying, "I have five children that are very worried about me, but I told them: 'you can sit on your couch and watch these atrocities on the television, or you can choose to take action to make them stop.'"

Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip have injured thousands of civilians and killed over 900 people, including hundreds of women and children. This ongoing Israeli massacre severely and massively violates international humanitarian law defined by the Geneva Conventions, especially the obligations of an Occupying Power and the requirements of the laws of war.

The United Nations has failed to protect the Palestinian civilian population from Israel's massive violations of international humanitarian law. Israel has closed off Gaza from the international community and demanded that all foreigners leave. But Huwaida Arraf, an organizer with the Free Gaza Movements, stated that, "We cannot just sit by and wait for Israel to decide to stop the killing and open the borders for relief workers to pick up the pieces. We are coming in. There is an urgent need for this mission as Palestinian civilians in Gaza are being terrorized and slaughtered by Israel, and access to humanitarian relief denied to them. When states and the international bodies responsible for taking action to stop such atrocities chose to be impotent,

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then we--the citizens of the world--must act. Our common humanity demands nothing less."

Israel has been notified that we are coming. A copy of the notification to the Israeli Authorities is attached. The Free Gaza Movement will hold Israel responsible for any harm that may be done to the ship or its passengers.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

Take Action! CALL the Israeli Government and let them know that the SPIRIT OF HUMANITY is coming to Gaza. DEMAND that Israel immediately STOP slaughtering civilians in Gaza and STOP using violence to prevent human rights and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people.

CALL

Mark Regev in the Prime Minister's office:

+972 2670 5354 or +972 5 0620 3264

mark.regev@it.pmo.gov.il

Shlomo Dror in the Ministry of Defence:

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+972 3697 5339 or +972 50629 8148

mediasar@mod.gov.il

Major Liebovitz from the Israeli Navy:

+ 972 5 781 86248

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Official Notification of Intent to Enter

January 11, 2009

To: The Israeli Ministry of Defense, Fax: 972-3-697-6717

To: The Israeli Navy

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To: The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fax 972-2-5303367

From: The Free Gaza Movement

This letter serves as a formal notification to you as the Occupying Power and belligerent force in the Gaza Strip that on Monday, January 12 we are navigating the motor vessel, Spirit of Humanity, from the Port of Larnaca to the port of Gaza City. Our vessel will be flying the Greek flag, and, as such, falls under the jurisdiction Greece.

We will be sailing from Cypriot waters into international waters, then directly into the territorial waters of the Gaza Strip without entering or nearing Israeli territorial waters. We expect to arrive at the Gaza Port on Tuesday, January 13, 2009.

We will be carrying urgently needed medical supplies in sealed boxes, cleared by customs at the Larnaca International Airport and the Port of Larnaca. There will be a total of 30 passengers and crew on board, among them members of various European Parliaments and several physicians. Our boat and cargo will also have received security clearance from the Port Authorities in Cyprus before we depart.

As it will be confirmed that neither we, the cargo, any of the boat's contents, nor the boat itself constitute any threat to the security of Israel or its armed forces, we do not expect any interference with our voyage by Israel's authorities.

On Tuesday, December 30, an Israeli Navy vessel violently, and without warning, attacked our motor vessel Dignity, disabling the vessel and endangering the lives of the 16 civilians on board. This notice serves as clear notification to you of our approach. Any attack on the motor vessel, Spirit of Humanity, will be premeditated and any harm inflicted on the 30 civilians on board will be considered the result of a deliberate attack on unarmed civilians.

The Steering Committee of the Free Gaza Movement

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PASSENGERS & CREW OF THE SPIRIT OF HUMANITY

Abufalah, Othman Mohammad, Journalist with Al Jazeera Television (Jordan)

Ahidar, Fouad, Member of Parliament (Belgium)

Arraf, Huwaida, human rights lawyer and Delegation Leader (Palestine/USA)

Bitsanis, Konstantinos, human rights worker and crew (Greece)

Bolos, Nikolas, human rights worker and crew (Greece)

Bowden, David, Journalist with SKY TV (UK)

Caruso, Francesco, former Member of Parliament (Italy)

Dabbagh, Ali, Doctor (UK)

Dritsas, Theodoros, Member of Parliament (Greece)

Gentile, Alessandro, Journalist with CNN (Italy)

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Gezelius, Mats, Journalist (Sweden/Finland)

Giannopolis, Nikolaos, human rights worker (Greece)

Jacquier, Gilles, Journalist with France Channel 2 (France)

Kampani, Chalent, Orthopedic Surgeon (Greece)

Kanellakis, Yiannis, Journalist with Greek Mega TV (Greece)

Karatzias, Petros, Journalist with the Associated Press (Cyprus)

Kawkuby, Jasir, Doctor and Pediatric Intensive Care specialist (Germany)

Klontzas, George, Ship's Captain (Greece)

Muncie, Andrew, human rights worker and crew (Scotland)

McLuckie, Garwen, Journalist with SKY TV (UK)

Mourad, Maimouni (Belgium)

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Muir, Alistair, Journalist with the BBC (UK)

Nuet, Joan Josef, Member of Parliament (Spain)

Papachristopoulos, Athanasios, Surgeon (Greece)

Pissias, Vangelis, University Professor (Greece)

Pratt, David, Journalist with the Sunday Herald (UK)

Prieto, Monica, Journalist with El Mundo (Spain)

Rahali, Hassan, Journalist (Belgium)

Robbins, Sonia, Surgeon (UK)

Sakorafa, Sofia, Member of Parliament (Greece)

Shakir, Thair, Journalist with Al Jazeera television (Iraq)

Synodynou, Melina, Journalist with Ethnos (Greece)

Tsatsis, Angelos, Journalist with MEGA TV (Greece)

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Vinci, Alessio, Journalist with CNN (Italy)

Yvon, Xavier, Journalist with RTL Radio (France)

Zdoukos, Theodoros, Doctor (Greece)

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