



Campaign for the Right to Enter the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt)

A Grassroots Campaign for the Protection of Foreign Passport Holders Residing in and/or Visiting the oPt

Israeli Attack on Flotilla Underscores Need to End Gaza Blockade, Dismantle Unlawful Regime of Movement & Access Restrictions in oPt (2 June, 2010)

The Right to Enter Campaign condemns in the strongest way the Israeli navy's assault on the multinational flotilla that was attempting to bring humanitarian supplies to Gaza on Monday. We are profoundly saddened by the deaths and injuries that have been caused by Israel's use of force against the ships, their crews and passengers.

It should be remembered that this latest incident happened in international waters and under article 3 of the Rome Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation of 1988, it is an international crime for any person to seize or exercise control over a ship by force, and also a crime to injure or kill any person in the process. When such acts are carried out by states or under their sponsorship, they constitute acts of war against the state under whose flag the ship is sailing.

Monday's events have clearly demonstrated Israel's resolve to continue the deliberate violence being inflicted by that blockade against the entire civilian population of Gaza in callous disregard of international humanitarian law and basic norms of humanity. As noted by Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco in his briefing to the UN Security Council, Monday's bloodshed would have been avoided if repeated calls on Israel to end the "counterproductive and unacceptable" blockade of Gaza had been heeded. It is time for the international community to ensure an immediate end to the blockade of Gaza.

The Gaza blockade is only the most recent and comprehensive measure in Israel's extensive regime of movement and access restrictions -- including construction of the 700 km (400 miles) Wall and a web of over 600 checkpoints arbitrarily restricting movement and access within the oPt, the withdrawal of Jerusalem residency rights from Palestinian Christians and Muslims, and the arbitrary denial of entry into and exit from the oPt. These measures have transformed Palestinian cities into Bantustans and wreaked havoc on the lives and livelihoods of Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Together with the settlement of Jewish Israelis in the oPt and the ongoing demolition of Palestinian homes, such internationally unlawful Israeli state-sponsored measures are perniciously transforming the demography and habitat of the oPt and the character of, and prospects for resolving, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Closure measures have been extensively and illegally employed by Israel as a policy instrument, and have been allowed to become a permanent element of the status quo in the occupied territories since January 1991, when Israel introduced a permit regime generally restricting Palestinian movement between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and within the West Bank, most

notably East Jerusalem. Gaza has been under increasing levels of closure since the early 1990s, culminating in the current blockade. More than two years ago, even before Israel's devastating military operation "Cast Lead," international humanitarian organisations warned that as a result of the blockade, conditions in Gaza had deteriorated to their worst levels since the start of Israel's military occupation in 1967. Nonetheless, the blockade has continued with international backing.

Like the blockade, the complex and pervasive system of permits and movement restrictions is employed by Israel in a manner that lacks any credible security-related purpose or justification, and, indeed, appears designed to provoke resistance and conflict. It is in fact being employed politically, and therefore unlawfully, to control virtually all aspects of Palestinian life in the oPt, to entrench the fragmentation and annexation of parts of the oPt, and as a means of collective and extra-judicial punishment and retaliation to coerce obedience and extort submission to its own unlawful and predatory acts.

While this remains the case, the energies of the Campaign, many international organizations, third state diplomats and countless individuals are being expended simply to mitigate the serious and unjustified harm being caused - to Palestinian family life, to the functioning of educational, religious and social service institutions and to Palestinian economic life. This state of affairs is unsustainable, and it would be irresponsible to pretend otherwise. Neither the peaceful end to occupation and conflict nor the security of an occupying power can be procured through such wanton measures of subjugation, the resort to collective penalties, systematic affronts to the occupied population's human security and dignity, the destruction of its territorial habitat or its subjection to conditions that instigate radical social and economic de-development.

Achieving reconciliation and peace through political means is impossible without ensuring adequate respect for rules, without adequately implementing state, non-state actor and personal accountability and without curtailing extravagant expectations of impunity. Such expectations on Israel's part are mainly responsible for yesterday's tragic events.

The Campaign calls for:

- effective international action to bring an immediate end to the blockade on Gaza;
- an international inquiry into what happened in Monday's events as a first step toward ending prevailing expectations of impunity for unlawful acts;
- the immediate release of all flotilla passengers and crew detained by Israel in international waters and reparation for any unlawful violence;
- an end to Israel's unlawful restrictions on movement into, out of and within the oPt and full respect for the right of all Palestinians to freedom of movement; and
- responsible Palestinian policies and efforts aimed at overcoming the blockade of Gaza;

The Campaign calls on the international community and third states to act swiftly and decisively in support of the above objectives. The Campaign also calls on concerned citizens around the world to intensify their efforts to hold the government of Israel and their own governments to their respective responsibilities under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

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