

Date: Sun, 4 Jan 2009 13:48:48 +0200From:
huwaida.arraf@gmail.comTo: gazafriends@lists.riseup.net; future-of-free-gaza@googlegroups.comSubject: [GazaFriends] FG Update and Call to Action

Dear Friends of Gaza,

On Monday, December 29 we sent our small ship, the DIGNITY, to besieged Gaza in an act of civil resistance against Israel's ongoing massacre and blockade. We attempted to bring doctors, journalists, human rights workers and over three tons of emergency medical aid to the suffering people of Gaza in the midst of the worst attacks against them in over 40 years. In a cowardly act of aggression the Israeli navy deliberately, repeatedly, and without warning rammed our unarmed ship, causing significant structural damage and endangering the lives of our passengers and crew. For CNN's coverage of the incident, see: <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=EZeNdIGI8os&feature=related> and http://www.freegaza.org/index.php?module=latest_news&id=ca72ff9b346077717c7a acb1545c7919&offset= This was an act of terror meant to prevent us from accessing the people of Gaza. We will not be intimidated.

We will not let Israel's terror tactics stop us from trying to reach the people of Gaza and doing all that we can to directly confront and challenge Israel's violence against the Palestinian people and ongoing affront to humanity.

GOALS

There is a time when silence is complicity and inaction is unacceptable. Free Gaza is neither a "protest group" nor an aid agency. Our mission and our work are political. We are a Palestinian and international effort dedicated to the principle of non-violent direct action. We are engaged in active, civil resistance against the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine, and the violence this occupation uses to sustain itself.

We do bring medicine, supplies, and doctors to besieged Gaza as we can, but this is utterly insufficient. Although humanitarian aid is very much needed, especially now in Gaza, focusing on humanitarian efforts alone is a form of complicity in Israel's malevolent quest to destroy the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian people do not need charity. They need freedom and justice. These are our goals.

STRATEGY

Many countries and groups have been directing their aid to Rafah in the hopes that the Rafah border will open and they will be able to get in humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people. A number of organizations have decided to try to apply pressure on the Egyptian government to open the Rafah border crossing. There have been demonstrations in front of various Egyptian embassies around the world demanding that Egypt open Rafah, and a number of organizations have called for amassing at Rafah to demand entry. Free Gaza may send a representative to Egypt to express our support for these efforts.

However, we believe that our efforts must stay focused on directly confronting Israel's violations of international humanitarian law, war crimes, and its ongoing belligerent occupation and continued denial of Palestinian human rights. Locking Gaza up like a prison and slaughtering its people is an intolerable crime. The governments of the world are complicit in this imprisonment and mass murder of Palestinians in Gaza. Sending in humanitarian aid without taking the political action needed to end Israel's occupation of Palestine and impunity for the crimes its committing is not enough. Our role is to challenge and inspire the international community to stand up, speak out, and take action to enforce the law and secure justice for Palestine.

THE DIGNITY

The Dignity is currently in Lebanon. It is estimated that it might take between one and two months to repair the Dignity. It looks like the frame is warped, and the blows by the Israeli warship are deeper than we first believed. Repairs to this ship are also going to cost much more than originally expected (over \$50,000 USD). For photos of the damage,

see: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/29205195@N02/sets/72157612017624425/>

ALTERNATE SHIP

We have located an alternate ship, which we're currently working on procuring. It's probably not the perfect boat for the Free Gaza Movement, but it's the most suitable and affordable one that we could locate in the short amount of time that we're trying to work in. Our new ship will carry about 30 passengers and 10-15 tons of cargo. We intend to leave for Gaza as soon as is possible, sometime within the next two weeks.

PASSENGERS

We will give priority for places on the boat to doctors, journalists (preference going to major media outlets), and political figures or other high profile people. We will try to take 2 or 3 long-term human rights workers in on this voyage as well. If we successfully enter,

we plan to make continuous, back to back trips for so long as funds are available. If you know doctors, journalists or politicians that would be willing to go with us please contact Karin at: kpally@earthlink.net or call Huwaida at +357-96-723-999 immediately. We will be putting together the list of passengers that we can accommodate on the first boat within the next 24-36 hours. However, we will also want to have a list of people ready to go on the second and third trips, if the first one makes it in, so do continue to direct people to us.

MEDICINES / CARGO We have received lists of urgently needed medical supplies from the Palestinian Ministry of Health and from hospitals in Gaza. If you know of groups in your country that would like to donate medical supplies or make a contribution towards the purchase of medical supplies, please put them in contact with Lubna immediately at lubnna@gmail.com or +357-99-081-767 **OUR MESSAGE** Israel has closed off Gaza from the international community and told all foreigners to leave. We are saying NO! We are coming in. We will not leave the Palestinian people to be slaughtered by Israel. Israel's actions amount to war crimes and the international community must take concrete action to end this catastrophe. When states and the international bodies responsible for taking action to stop such atrocities chose to be impotent, then we--the citizens of the world--must act. We are willing to risk our lives in witness and to try to end this madness. We must work as hard and risk as much for justice as the policymakers in Israel do for war and killing. Our common humanity demands nothing less. Please join us.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT OUR MISSION We know that there are large and amazingly powerful demonstrations and actions taking place around the world. In addition to all the work we know that everyone is already engaged in, we'd like you to please consider the following to help support our mission: We're seeking to take extraordinary action and we need the mobilization of all in order to help us create the proper environment to make this work. We need your help to make it difficult for Israel to stop us even before our boat hits the water. Please help by: . Planning a vigil at the Israeli Embassy in your country or any other public place, from the moment the boat departs (we will inform you of this ahead of time) until the boat's safe arrival in Gaza . Contacting your local media and asking them to cover our mission. Asking your elected representatives to issue statements supporting our boat mission;. Writing letters to your local media about the importance of this kind of direct-action resistance; Once we set sail, we do not plan on turning back. We will stay at sea, insisting on access to Gaza, until we succeed or Israel gravely attacks or arrests us. Through all of this, we know and will insist that we are not the story. The story is the tragedy that is happening to the civilians of Gaza and why Israel is being allowed to commit these crimes with impunity. For continued

updates from Palestinians and FG and ISM volunteers on the ground in Gaza, please refer to our website: <http://www.FreeGaza.org> In

solidarity & struggle,

The Free Gaza Movement <http://www.FreeGaza.org>