

The Free Gaza Movement

Breaking the Siege of Gaza

F.G. Human Rights Projects, Ltd
Registered Charity #HE 246993
122 Athalassis Avenue, POB 28779
2082 Nicosia, Cyprus
Tel: +357 99 081 767
Email: friends@freegaza.org

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www.FreeGaza.org

Sunday, 26 July 2009

The Honorable Jan Peter Balkenende
Prime Minister of the Netherlands

Dear Prime Minister Balkenende,

We are writing out of deep distress over the political and humanitarian catastrophe created by Israel's illegal closure of the Gaza Strip. **We respectfully require your immediate assistance.**

Last March, the Netherlands pledged \$170,100,000 USD toward the reconstruction of Gaza. We would like to thank you for your generosity, but it is not enough. The struggle for Palestinian civil rights, human rights, and self-determination cannot occur in a vacuum. It's now more than six months since the end of Israel's 22-day assault on the Gaza Strip, which led to the killing of over 1400 Palestinians, and the people of Gaza are still living in rubble. Though the Netherlands and other nations pledged a total of over \$4.2 billion for Gaza at the Sharm el-Sheikh Conference on 2 March 2009, Israel's closure policy has prevented this needed assistance from being delivered to Gaza.

The situation in Gaza is unacceptable. Israel's hermetic closure policy constitutes collective punishment of an occupied civilian population, an act strictly prohibited under Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. As a signatory to the Geneva Conventions, the Netherlands has an obligation to ensure that Israel respect international humanitarian law.

Given the sustained failure of the international community to enforce its own laws and protect the people of Gaza, we strongly believe that we all have a moral obligation to directly intervene to uphold international principles. Since August 2008, international volunteers in the Free Gaza Movement have been sailing to Gaza. Ours remain the only international ships to reach Gaza since 1967. But last month, twenty-one human rights activists aboard one of our small ships were abducted at gunpoint by the Israeli military, thrown in jail for a week and then deported.

The international community must not remain silent and allow these violations to continue.

The Free Gaza Movement intends to continue sailing unarmed boats to Gaza regardless of Israeli threats or actions. We will continue to take in human rights defenders, journalists, and parliamentarians, as well much-needed humanitarian and reconstruction supplies. The only "protection" these voyages have is the conscience of the world.

We know that you share our alarm over the distress deliberately imposed on Gaza's civilian population. But we also believe international action must become commensurate with the crisis, and we trust that you have an important role to play as Prime Minister of the Netherlands.

We urge you to express your support for international citizens' efforts to overcome the siege of Gaza through direct and peaceful resistance. More importantly, **we urge you to consider sending a cargo ship**, as part of an international flotilla, to directly challenge Israel's illegal blockade. We will be in further contact with your office to discuss how this might be arranged.

Respectfully Yours,

Huwaida Arraf, Chairperson
Free Gaza Movement