

Sailing into Gaza (Update 9)

Contributed by Yvonne Ridley
Sunday, 10 August 2008

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As I began entering my teens the whole grotesque business of Apartheid South Africa became more and more apparent and even more abhorrent in my eyes.

Why should someone be discriminated against on the colour of their skin ... well that's like picking on someone because they're of a different faith, I thought.

Public awareness, boycott campaigns, political pressure, ordinary folk mobilising and putting their lives at risk to highlight the struggle of black South Africans made headlines.

Of course we know how the brutality of that Apartheid regime came crashing down and today no one speaks about Nelson Mandela other than in glowing terms.

Parallels are now being drawn with the Anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa and the demand for justice for Palestinians.

Israel is no longer seen as a victim but a jack-booted thug, bully and oppressor.

International outrage and cries for justice are growing ever louder and I can see public opinion turning away from the Zionist State on a daily basis – gone are the days of 'plucky little Israel' fighting for its very existence.

No one believes anymore that it will be driven into the seas. (Personally I believe it will implode. It is a failed state which can only thrive on the misery and injustice of others).

Judging by the positive media our Free Gaza Movement is receiving it is quite obvious the tide of public opinion is turning just as it did against the oppressive regime in South Africa.

But in the meantime it has to be said that Mahmoud Abbas is no Mandela. he sits, almost in silence as the atrocities against his own people are continuing which makes me realise how vital is the success of our peaceful mission.

Despite a few minor hiccups delaying our launch, we will be sailing from Crete for Cyprus and then on to Palestine to smash the siege of Gaza using two boats crewed by an international brigade of peace activists from across the world.

We have been told to expect thousands of Palestinians taking to the beaches in Gaza to give us a welcome when our two boats SS Free Gaza and SS Liberty arrive.

Sadly, one face not among the crowds will be that of 12-year-old Mohamed Bahloul who is lying in a shabby, hospital ward in Gaza.

He is suffering from kidney failure and is hooked up to a dilapidated dialysis machine which barely operates.

Sadly Mohamed's case is all too common.

Welcome to the reality of life in Gaza - despite the ceasefire between the Hamas government in Gaza and Israel that ensured that homemade rockets are no longer fired at southern Israeli towns. Despite this ceasefire there is no respite from poverty and the medieval siege in Gaza. And what's more the situation is getting worse by the day.

Hospitals are lacking equipment and medicine, and neither Israel nor Egypt allows Palestinians from Gaza suffering from life threatening illnesses to travel freely, and on a regular basis. Now even water in Gaza is polluted beyond foreseeable remedy.

"If there is a stronger word than catastrophe, I would use that word," said Nader Al-Khateeb, the Palestinian director of Friends of the Earth Middle East. The catastrophe is a "result of Gaza's dilapidated water and sewage infrastructure undermined by [Israeli] attacks and fuel blockades."

This slow genocide of the people of Gaza is a shame to all of us.

And if, in any tiny way, our little peace mission to smash the Israeli blockade of Gaza, can relieve some of the suffering then we will have achieved a minor victory.

Because what I do know is that the Arab leaders in the region are doing nothing to help the plight of their brothers and sisters in Palestine.

And Western politicians may dismiss our efforts as amateurish, but at least we are doing something positive.

Their achievements have amounted to very little after 60 years of diplomacy.

Some of the most disgusting behaviour has come from neighbouring Egypt as I mentioned yesterday when I attacked Hosni Mubarak a man who dances to the tunes played by the US and Israeli pipers.

In the meantime, Hamas is regularly derided for human rights violations reported in Gaza, which are now being used retrospectively to justify the brutal Israeli siege. At the same time Mahmoud Abbas's party hardly receives any reprimand for its brutality towards its own people.

In truth, Abbas is a US controlled puppet who sits over an extremely corrupt regime bank-rolled by America and other donors.

According to some western media reports you might be forgiven for thinking that the conflict is entirely the fault of rival Palestinians, with the Zionist State being nothing more than an innocent observer which has to put up with its noisy neighbours.

However, let me remind you of the words of UN Special rapporteur on human rights, John Dugard who wrote last year: "The question whether Gaza remains an occupied territory is now of academic interest only. In the course of the cynically named "Operation Summer Rains" that commenced on 25 June, the IDF has not only asserted its control in Gaza by means of heavy shelling, but has also done so by means of a military presence."

Make no mistake, Israel is presiding over a slow genocide of the people who exist in the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, I'm told to watch out for new tactics from the Zionist military as they attempt to stop our boats from sailing into Gaza in a few days time. Reports have just reached me that a couple of days ago as Palestinians, internationals and Israeli activists demonstrated against the Israeli Apartheid wall in Bi’lin, soldiers began to spray an unknown substance over the demonstrators from a truck.

The liquid was discoloured and foul smelling and a number of demonstrators vomited and many had to leave the area as the stench was so unbearable. As demonstrators withdrew, soldiers also fired tear gas canisters at them.

This, apparently is a new low in the tactics deployed by the fourth largest army in the world ... a cowardly army which uses live rounds to kill and maim women and children. Activists are awaiting results from analysis of the liquid samples that were collected during the demonstration and naturally, I have a personal interest in knowing their contents.

But all of this behaviour from these silly men in uniforms only makes me more determined than ever to step on to the beach of Gaza.

And once I get there the first person I'm going to ask about is our little brother who is hooked up to a dialysis machine.

Hang in there, Mohamed.

PS: Apologies to the wonderful Uri Davies who I interviewed the first day I arrived in Cyprus to join the Free Gaza Movement. I referred to him as an Israeli Jew.

He says he is neither – he is in fact a Palestinian-Hebrew (citizen of the apartheid State of Israel and of the allegedly democratic monarchy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland - NOT an "Israeli").

Glad that's sorted!