

Sailing into Gaza (Update 18 -Final)

Contributed by Yvonne Ridley
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Well, you would have to be deaf, dumb and blind not to know that I am writing to you today from Gaza. I really was too overwhelmed yesterday to put pen to paper after the magnificent welcome I and my fellow peace activists from SS Liberty and SS Free Gaza received as we entered the port of Gaza ... the first ships to sail in since 1967.

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But I really want to make one thing very clear to you here and now.

Israel did not give us permission to enter Gaza - the reality is they could NOT STOP us even if they tried.

And believe me some of the tactics to scupper our historic voyage were unbelievable.

Some of us, our family and friends have received death threats by telephone, text and emails while the whole Free Gaza Movement was targeted by Zionists lawyers who tried to sink our mission before it even began.

We were accused of being a front for a Hamas operated gun-running venture and even Iran was accused of being party to supplying weapons.

Then Israel Foreign Minister Zvi Livni made a snide comment a few days ago saying she hoped we could all swim while the Naval Commander announced he was running military exercises off the coast of Gaza and had thrown a 35-mile wide exclusion zone around.

I really want to make one thing very clear to you here and now. Israel did not give us permission to enter Gaza - the reality is they could NOT STOP us even if they tried. As you know we set off from Larnaca, determined but a little nervous on Friday and, in the dead of night, all of our communications went down ... satellite phones, radar etc. There we were sailing in rough seas, in the pitch black without any form of communication to the outside world.

It was psychological warfare but the Zionist scare tactics failed and driven by nothing more than people power and a couple of seaworthy engines the SS Free Gaza and the SS Liberty sailed into a tumultuous welcome in Gaza.

It was one of those defining moments in history - a bit like the first brick of the Berlin Wall being dislodged by ordinary citizens sick of the injustices imposed in a world run by political bullies.

All I could hear ringing in my ears was "Free, Free, Free Gaza and Allahu Akbar".

The emotion was unbelievable and the joy swept us all along on the crest of a gigantic Palestinian wave of delight and disbelief.

We have now smashed the medieval siege imposed by Israel but we will not stop.

Now we need to tear down the checkpoint and crossing at Rafah where so much humanitarian aid has arrived only to be refused entry.

The Egyptian Government should hang its head in shame that a bunch of largely white, non-Muslim westerners smashed the brutal siege by sea to reach the Palestinians and now they must do the same.

There were a few weasel words from Abu Mazen on the day we arrived ... why did the Palestinian leader take so long to send us a goodwill message? Was he waiting for the greenlight by his political masters in Washington and Tel Aviv? 'Fraid it was too little too late from a man who is doing his best to ignore the people of Gaza ... shame, shame, shame on you!

And as for the words of goodwill from the Arab League - back them up with hard cash to make this whole Free Gaza Movement permanent so we can open a ferry between Larnaca and Gaza which will run regularly.

Finally, a big thank you to all of you out there who have given us unstinting solidarity, support and encouragement.

It is time for the politicians to move aside and let the people take over - the people united will never be defeated.

Must dash - I'm about to get my passport stamped with Gaza, Gaza City.