

Labor Groups Condemn Israeli Attack on Freedom Flotilla

Tuesday 10 August 2010, by [BEYERSTEIN Lindsay](#) (Date first published: 3 June 2010).

Early Monday morning, Israeli commandos staged a pre-dawn raid on a flotilla of vessels bearing aid to the Gaza strip. The commandos rappelled onto the deck of the largest ship in the convoy, the Mavi Marmara, a Turkish-flagged passenger vessel carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza.

What happened next is subject to considerable debate. This much is clear: At least 9 activists were shot dead and several activists and Israeli soldiers were injured in the ensuing melee. Everyone agrees that the attack took place in international waters.

The Freedom Flotilla project had strong trade union ties from the outset. Trade union members set sail with the Freedom Flotilla, according to press releases. Ewa Jasiewicz a union organizer and journalist based in London was reportedly a passenger on one of the ships. And a Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) official was instrumental in helping Free Gaza campaign organizers buy one of the flotilla ships, although that vessel was not present during the raid due to mechanical difficulties.

Trade union reaction to the raids was swift.

“[M]eeting a humanitarian convoy with military force is unacceptable,” said International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) General Secretary Guy Ryder,” said in a statement issued Monday. The ITUC repeated its call on Israel to lift the blockade on Gaza.

The International Transport Workers’s Federation (ITF) issued a statement holding Israel fully responsible for the “provocative storming” of the Mavi Marmara and any harm that came to civilians as a result. The ITF has been working with unions in Israel and Palestine to advocate for an end to the siege of Gaza. David Cockroft, ITF General Secretary called the raid a “serious setback.”

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) expressed shock at the “brutal attacks” on civilians including journalists. About 100 media workers were on the flotilla at the time at the attack, according to IFJ General Secretary Aidan White. The IFJ is calling for a full investigation into the incident. White said he will raise the issue at a special meeting of the UN Human Rights Council.

Not all trade unions support the Freedom Flotilla’s attempt to circumvent the blockade of Gaza, however. Even before the raid, some Israeli unions threatened to re-instate their boycott of Turkish tourism over Ankara’s role in organizing the Freedom Flotilla. About 380 of the 700 activists on the flotilla were Turkish nationals. It appears that all but one of the protesters who were killed were Turkish nationals. The remaining fatality was a 19-year-old American citizen of Turkish descent who lived in Turkey.

In March, Ken Fleming, an International Transport Federation inspector and the SIPTU official referenced above, applied to purchase one of the boats in the Freedom Flotilla on behalf of the Free Gaza campaign after the vessel was abandoned by its owner, leaving its crew with no wages and only a day’s supply of food.

At the time, Fleming said it was fitting that the vessel would be used for humanitarian assistance instead of the exploitation of seafarers. The crew got their back pay. The vessel was rechristened the MV Rachel Corrie, after an American activist who was fatally run over by Israeli bulldozers in the Gaza Strip in 2003. But the ship wasn't with the Freedom Flotilla during the raid because of mechanical troubles.

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P.S.

* From In These Times, Thursday, June 3 1:47 pm:

http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/6052/labor_groups_condemn_israeli_attack_on_freedom_flotilla/