

Jim Roche,

Eamon Gilmore
Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Department of Foreign Affairs
80 St Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2

20 June 2011

Dear Minister Gilmore,

FREEDOM FLOTILLA II - STAY HUMAN

I am writing to inform you that 24 other Irish citizens and myself will be participating in the New Freedom Flotilla II - Stay Human to Gaza on board the Irish ship MV Saoirse in the next ten days. Please note that there will be many people of the Jewish faith on the international flotilla, including 86-year old Hedy Epstein who lost her parents in the Holocaust. Some of your Oireachtas and party colleagues will also be taking part, as well as other members of civil society.

I am writing to request that you call publicly on the Israeli Government to allow free passage of the Irish ship to Gaza and for it to withdraw its threats of violent action against the participants.

This humanitarian action by concerned peace activists from around the globe including Ireland, is motivated by solidarity with the besieged people of Gaza and a sense of exasperation with the conspiracy of silence by the governments of the world. The effects of the illegal Israeli siege continue to cause terrible human suffering for the Palestinian people.

According to a new UN report published in March 2011, the blockade imposed by Israel in June 2007 has “locked in” 1.5 million people (some half of whom are under the age of 16) in what is one of the most densely populated areas on earth, triggering “a protracted human dignity crisis” with grave humanitarian consequences. The most recent figures published by the UN and international humanitarian and human rights organisations confirm that roughly 80% of the population rely on international aid in order to survive; 65% live below the poverty line; 52% are food insecure; nearly 40% are unemployed; there are no building materials for much-needed schools and hospitals; nearly all of the drinking water is contaminated and unfit for consumption; cancer and other

seriously ill patients cannot get access to the specialist treatment that would potentially save their lives; and children are suffering untreated post-traumatic stress as a result of the white phosphorous shells used illegally in Israel's Operation Cast Lead in January 2009.

Two and a half years following this brutal military onslaught – which resulted in the deaths of almost 1500 people (among them 430 children) and the destruction of thousands of homes and buildings – almost no homes and buildings have been rebuilt, sanitation and sewage systems are worse than ever with raw waste being pumped into the sea, farmers continue to be shot at along the border with Israel, nutrition deficiencies and malnutrition continue to rise, the economy is shut down by a lack of functioning factories and electricity, students hold little to no prospects of exiting for study abroad and the ill continue to suffer for want of necessary medications and medical supplies and equipment.

The extent of the crisis was underlined in December 2010, when 22 international humanitarian organisations, including Amnesty International, Oxfam, Save the Children, Christian Aid and Medical Aid for Palestinians produced a comprehensive report calling for international action to force Israel to unconditionally lift its blockade, noting that the Palestinians of Gaza continue to live in the same devastating and dehumanising conditions.

Earlier this month (June 2011), the health authority in Gaza proclaimed a state of emergency due to an acute shortage of vital medicines. Approximately 178 types of medications and 123 types of medical supplies have run out, and an additional 69 types of medications and 70 types of medical supplies are expected to run out within the next three months. The claim by the Israeli authorities last year that they would deliver the supplies they offloaded at the port of Ashdod has been exposed as a lie – since it was recently revealed that medicines confiscated by Israel from last year's flotilla have still not been delivered and are now, in any case, out of date.

Minister, the people of Gaza are being slowly starved and are being completely deprived of their human rights to live in dignity. This is happening while the Governments of the world remain silent. That is why concerned citizens from around the world have organised this humanitarian flotilla.

Given Ireland's long history of empathy with oppressed peoples I urge you now to lead the way among Foreign Ministers of the world and to call on Israel to end the illegal siege of Gaza, to comply with relevant UN resolutions and the Geneva

Convention, to allow safe passage for the Freedom Flotilla and to withdraw its threat of violence against the peaceful participants.

I urge you to be on the right side of history and to openly condemn the continued oppression of the Palestinian people by a state practicing apartheid policies.

Yours faithfully,

Jim Roche
PRO Steering Committee Irish Anti War Movement
Member of Irish Ship to Gaza Steering Committee
Member of Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign