



Who is organizing “Canadian Boat to Gaza” and why?

The Canadian Boat to Gaza (CBG) is a project initiated by 26 veteran social-justice activists from across Canada. The initiative is intended to assist international efforts to break the Israeli-led blockade of Gaza. To do this, the CBG will non-violently challenge Israel’s illegal blockade, and seek to draw international attention to the suffering of the people of Gaza.¹ The group is sending a boat — *Tahrir* (“liberation” in Arabic) — to carry medical supplies and other urgently-needed humanitarian aid to Gaza. The boat also intends to transport exports out of Gaza.

Tahrir is expected to sail in the last 10 days of June 2011, and will join up to 14 other passenger and cargo ships in *Freedom Flotilla II* for the final leg of the voyage. Flotilla participants have indicated that they do not seek a violent confrontation with the Israeli Army as they approach Gaza, and would welcome inspection by the UN or other neutral international bodies as prescribed in international naval accords.

Why is the blockade of Gaza such an issue?

The blockade of Gaza is morally and legally problematic from several perspectives:

- It constitutes the collective punishment of the people of Gaza, and thus violates international law²;
- It prevents the repair of homes and infrastructure destroyed during Israel’s 2008-09 assault on Gaza;
- It negatively affects the health of the Palestinians of Gaza – especially the children;
- It strangles Gaza’s economy, and creates despair and hopelessness in Gaza.

Israel has been urged many times by the United Nations and neutral international NGOs (e.g. the Red Cross, Oxfam UK, Save the Children and Amnesty International) to lift the blockade of Gaza. Pressure to do so was particularly intense after an Israeli armed forces’ May 31, 2010 raid on a Gaza-bound humanitarian aid flotilla left nine flotilla participants dead. This led Israel to announce an “easing” of the blockade June 20, 2010. However, a study by 21 international aid organizations in late 2010 found that the key elements of the blockade have remained in effect and the civilian population of Gaza continues to suffer.³

Who has endorsed “Canadian Boat to Gaza”?⁴

Canadian endorsers: Aside from the organizers, dozens of other respected Canadians have endorsed the Canadian Boat to Gaza, including: McGill international human rights professor Warren Allmand (former Solicitor General of Canada); Maher Arar (Human Rights Activist); physicist and U of T professor Ursula Franklin; journalist and feminist Judy Rebick; renowned classical pianist Anton Kuerti; singers Raffi Cavoukian and Geoff Berner; U of T law professor Michael Mandel; novelist Gil Courtemanche; journalists Linda McQuaig and Murray Dobbin; filmmakers Martin Duckworth and Mary Ellen Davis; current or former federal MPs Alex Atamanenko (NDP), Jim Manly (NDP), and Raymond Gravel (BQ); MLA Amir Kadir (Quebec Solidaire); Christian Peacemaker Teams member James Loney and Vancouver rabbi David Mivasair.

At least 150 Canadian civil society organizations have also endorsed the Boat: various faith-based groups, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, Independent Jewish Voices, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, London District Labour Council; the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN-CNTU), and local branches of international human rights organizations, among others.

International endorsers include Noam Chomsky (linguist, philosopher and MIT Professor), Mairead Maguire (Nobel Peace Prize winner, 1976), Dennis Halliday (former United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq), Ann Wright (Ret. US Colonel and diplomat), John Pilger (Australian author and documentary filmmaker), and Haneen Zoabi and Jamal Zahalka (Members of the Israeli Knesset), among others.

Who will be aboard the “Canadian Boat to Gaza”?

Approximately 30-35 Canadians will be aboard the *Tahrir*, including: representatives of Fédération des Femmes de Quebec and the Canadian Muslim Federation; Quebec Solidaire politician Manon Massé; Christian Peacemaker Teams member Harmeet Singh Sooden (hostage in Iraq in 2005); Robert Lovelace, retired chief of Ardoch Algonquin First Nation and Queen’s professor; filmmaker and York professor John Greyson; human rights activists, physicians

and lawyers; and University of Western Ontario professor David Heap. Some of them are young, others are grandparents. Ten to twelve Australian, Belgian and Danish flotilla participants will also travel on the Canadian boat. *La Presse* newspaper and *Radio Canada* crews will accompany them to cover the developments.

Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*) and Irish, Spanish and Greek Members of the European Parliament will be traveling in other Freedom Flotilla II vessels.

What reaction has Freedom Flotilla II drawn?

Israel: Israeli authorities have indicated that they will use force to prevent Freedom Flotilla II from reaching Gaza. A senior Israeli Navy official told the *Jerusalem Post* that Israel was preparing a number of "surprises" for the ships participating in the flotilla.⁵ Israeli military officials have said that troops have been training for months to intercept any flotilla.⁶ Commando Unit Shayetet 13 (which conducted the lethal attack on the *Mavi Marmara* in May 2010) is "undergoing specialized training" involving "mock raids aboard a vessel." Israeli Navy sources have also said troops will again be heavily armed.⁷ According to Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*:

"The navy is focusing on riot-control measures this time, saying they will use force as a last resort. Israeli defense sources said recently that ... there is no alternative to taking over the boats and protesters by force — barring an agreement that would cancel the flotilla. Former Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi ... said that if necessary, *sniper fire* [CJPME's emphasis] would be used to take down violent protesters. This would prevent face-to-face clashes that hold a greater risk to soldiers' lives."⁸

The Israeli government has also been pressuring other governments to prevent their citizens from participating in Freedom Flotilla II. Hours after Flotilla II delegates met with Members of the European Parliament, Israeli diplomats held a press conference in the same room.⁹

Canada: On May 29, Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird warned "Unauthorized efforts to deliver aid are provocative and, ultimately, unhelpful to the people of Gaza. ... Canada recognizes Israel's legitimate security concerns and its right to protect itself and its residents from attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups, including by preventing the smuggling of weapons." Baird's comments imply that the government views Freedom Flotilla II participants as Hamas sympathizers or potential weapons smugglers, or that blockade opponents

are indifferent to Israel's security concerns. Some CBG organizers perceive Baird's comments as tacit pre-authorization for Israel to attack the Canadian Boat to Gaza.

Turkey: Israel has pressured Turkey to stop the Mavi Marmara and the Obama administration has offered to let Turkey host Israeli-Palestinian peace talks if it prevents its citizens from participating in Freedom Flotilla II. Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu acerbically noted that democratic governments had no right to stop their people from challenging an illegal blockade. He added that warnings about a second international Gaza flotilla should be directed at Israel, which needed to recognize the changing realities in the Middle East.¹⁰ It is interesting to note that many of the Turkish activists aboard the famous 2010 Gaza Freedom Flotilla will also be participating in the upcoming Freedom Flotilla (II), this time with many more international supporters aboard.

¹ Canadian Boat to Gaza – Mission Statement

(<http://www.tahrir.ca/content/mission-statement> , June 2, 2011)

² For more detailed information about the impact and illegality of the blockade of Gaza, see CJPME factsheets "*Did Israel loosen its illegal blockade of Gaza?*" (December 2010), "*The Blockade of Gaza, 2007-2010*" (June 2010) and "*The illegality of the Gaza blockade*" (June 2010.)

³ Amnesty International UK et al. "Dashed Hopes: Continuation of the Gaza Blockade," p. 3.

⁴ Canadian Boat to Gaza – Endorsements. (www.tahrir.ca/endorsements . June 2, 2011)

⁵ Jerusalem Post. "Navy prepared to board flotilla ships if they don't stop," May 31, 2011

⁶ Haaretz. "One year on, Mavi Marmara gears up for second protest trip to Gaza Strip," (Zvi Bar'el and Jack Khoury) May 31, 2011

⁷ Global Research. "Israel's Operational Plan to Attack the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza," (Michel Chossudovsky) May 31, 2011

⁸ Haaretz. "Israel prepping to block next Gaza flotilla," May 31, 2011

⁹ Conversation with Ehab Lotayef, June 3, 2011.

¹⁰ Haaretz. "Turkey FM: We can't stop upcoming aid flotilla to Gaza," May 30, 2011