

most influential civil initiatives that took place in contemporary history. This materialized as a consequence of international organizations from different parts of the world - the Free Gaza Movement, IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, Ship to Gaza Greece, Ship to Gaza Sweden, The European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza and The International Committee to Lift the Siege on Gaza - came together to deliver much-needed help to Gaza by breaking the Israeli embargo. It gathered almost 700 volunteers from 37 countries - from Indonesia and Malaysia to South Africa, Sweden and the US - among others - representing people of different background, ethnicity, race, language and age in the pursuit of one common cause. Hundreds of people whose governments have ignored what has been happening in Palestine for reasons of self-interest, took their place on board the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, just because they are human beings, in order to end the on-going humanitarian crisis on Gaza. Immediately after the announcement for the flotilla was made, a surge of applications followed; the boats of the flotilla and tons of humanitarian relief were ready through donations sent by the flotilla supporters. Gaza Freedom Flotilla

# MAVI MARMARA



Gaza Freedom Flotilla

Mavi Marmara - Gaza Freedom Flotilla

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MAVI  
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Gaza Freedom Flotilla



THE INTERNATIONAL  
COMMITTEE  
TO LIFT THE  
SIEGE ON GAZA



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# PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE GAZA FREEDOM FLOTILLA





## Preparatory work for the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla"

Economic and political measures started to be imposed on the Gaza Strip in February 2006 following Hamas' election victory in the legislative election, accompanied by the withholding of financial resources on the part of donor countries. The closure on the Gaza Strip was imposed by Israel after Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. In September 2007, Israel declared the Gaza Strip "hostile territory" and that the movement of goods into and out of Gaza would be restricted for security concerns as well as in order to apply pressure on the Hamas government "as part of the State of Israel's operations against continuous terrorism." Harsher fuel restrictions came into effect since October 2007.

UN Human Rights Council Report of International Fact-Finding Mission (Article 30), September 27, 2010

The humanitarian crisis experienced by people in Gaza had been the subject of discussion among various non-governmental organizations in the world and by human rights activists well before the Gaza Freedom Flotilla was conceived and launched. Different personalities and institutions from all over the world were organizing supportive activities for Gaza.

In November 2009, marking the first anniversary of Operation Cast Lead, Viva Palestina (UK) and IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation (Turkey) made the "Viva Palestina (Open Road to Palestine) land convoy to Gaza where life conditions were deteriorating drastically. Tens of humanitarian volunteers who were coming from different directions and countries managed to deliver 155 vehicles that included ambulances and humanitarian supplies for urgent needs of the people of Gaza.

But from this experience, it quickly became clear that a small scale operation like this one was not adequate to improve the humanitarian condition of the people trapped in the vast open air prison called Gaza. However, Viva Palestina land convoy had made a serious dent in world public opinion supporting Gaza and prepared

the ground for the next operation to gather the support of a much wider audience. The organizers of the land convoy and the NGOs urging an end to the blockade of Gaza reached a consensus to form a well-attended organization that could deliver both humanitarian supplies to Gaza as well as awaken world public opinion to exert international pressure for the lifting of the illegal blockade.

Then the preparatory work started for the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" which included six NGOs: *The European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza*, *The Free Gaza Movement*, *IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation*, *The International Committee to Lift the Siege on Gaza*, *Ship to Gaza Greece*, and *Ship to Gaza Sweden*. The preparation work took more than a year. While all the components, the way they operated, their cultures and the institutional structures were so diverse and different from each other that they made a great effort on the Palestinian cause and this diversity helped to contribute a great deal to their work.

After the land convoy, the flotilla organization committee set to work to inform public opinion on various platforms about the purpose and composition of the cargo of the flotilla.

The various components of the flotilla wanted the organization to reach the widest possible area and thus moved their campaign towards this end. Ahead of its journey, Gaza Freedom Flotilla had already had the support of hundreds of NGOs and people from around the world, from Latin America to South Africa, and from Europe to Southeast Asia.

## Gaza Freedom Flotilla organizers



### The Free Gaza Movement

It is an umbrella organization established by pro-Palestinian groups and human rights advocates to increase public awareness against the

blockade on Gaza Strip with the help of ships carrying humanitarian supplies. Uniting Christian, Muslim and Jewish NGOs across Europe to break the Israeli siege on Gaza, the Free Gaza Movement launched the project in the fall of 2006. The work to secure funds for the purchase of ships and finding suitable crews to navigate them to Gaza took two years. The ships and crew members were from different countries: Australia, UK, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Lebanon, Palestine and the US. The movement took its first attempt to break the Gaza blockade in 2008. Setting sail to Gaza in August 2008 aboard two small fishing boats, the organization included human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, academics and parliamentarians and hoped to deliver humanitarian supplies

to the region. (For detailed information visit: [www.freegaza.org](http://www.freegaza.org))

The Free Gaza Movement sailed towards Gaza eight times from August 2008 to May 2010 in order to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza.



### Ship to Gaza Greece

This is an initiative of a non-profit group that had joined the

Free Gaza Movement's sea journey from Greece in August 2008 to break the blockade of Gaza. The organization champions for Israeli siege of Palestine to end, for the lifting of the blockade in the West Bank and Gaza and supports the recognition of the Palestinian refugee rights to turn back to their homeland and the release of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails. (For detailed information visit: [www.shiptogaza.gr](http://www.shiptogaza.gr))



### Ship to Gaza Sweden

Ship to Gaza Sweden is a civilian initiative whose mission is to breach the Israeli blockade by sending humanitarian

aid using boats from the Scandinavian countries. (For detailed information visit: [www.shiptogaza.se](http://www.shiptogaza.se))



### IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation

Making no distinction between peoples' religion, language, ethnicity or sect, IHH has been working since 1992 to deliver humanitarian assistance and prevent violation of the rights of those who have fallen into difficulties anywhere in the world, whether struck by natural disasters or subjected to human cruelty. They could be victims of wars left without food or shelter or they may have been injured and crippled. Whatever their plight, IHH has made it its mission to prevent the violation of their rights. Having started with voluntary activities that were institutionalized in 1995, IHH works on five continents in 125 countries. IHH carries out its activities all across the world giving priority to regions where wars have devastated people's lives and their negative effects linger on. IHH works in disaster areas, and in regions and countries that suffer from poverty. The foundation has been involved in charity activities for Palestine from the day it was founded but it intensified efforts on Gaza following the Israeli-imposed blockade that started in 2006. IHH began sending coordinated humanitarian relief supplies to the region. (For detailed information visit: [www.ihh.org.tr](http://www.ihh.org.tr))



### The International Committee to Lift the Siege on Gaza

It is an international organization that endeavours to end the Israeli imposed siege on Palestine. The Committee considers such

distributed to the general public in Turkey. Another press release was drafted on behalf of the organizing committee and was shared with public right before the Mavi Marmara, which was going to carry a large number of flotilla participants, departed from Antalya (See document 4).

From day one the organization, whose work was greeted with great interest across the world, was supported by conferences, concerts, ticketed organizations, photo exhibitions, charity fairs, and similar activities. All kinds of humanitarian supplies onboard the Gaza Freedom Flotilla –from construction and educational materials to sanitary ware, presents for orphans to playgrounds– were obtained through the efforts of such charitable activities. The organizer of the flotilla in Turkey, IHH, organized more than 300 programs in 81 Turkish cities. The flotilla became known to the wider public in Turkey through those activities, and soon thereafter, contributions, large and small, started to pour in. Elementary

school students sold their toys and donated the proceeds for the children of Gaza. Prisoners at different prisons made ship models to be sold in auctions and money thus rose to be sent to Gaza. Young and old, everybody mobilized for Gaza. The ships of the flotilla did not only have a symbolic significance as cargo ships carrying humanitarian aid supplies, but they also had a remarkable mission in terms of manifesting the world's support behind them.

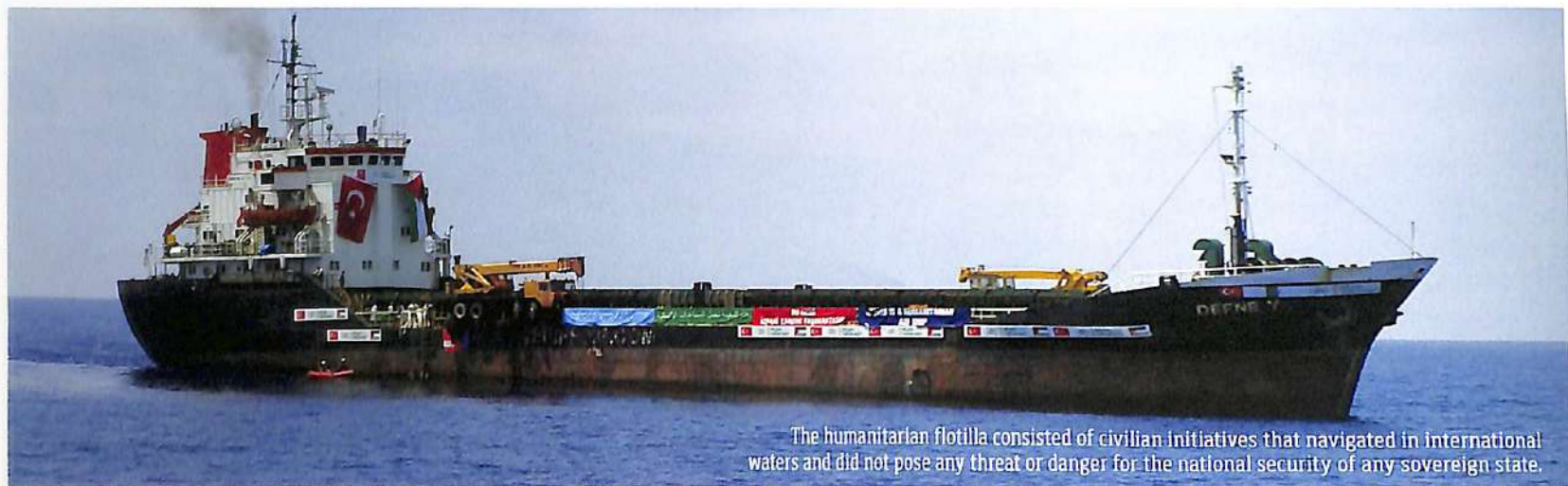
The UN and its affiliated organizations, various heads of state and other high-profile state officials and bureaucrats were provided with an information letter regarding the objectives of the organization and the scope of its work (See document 5). All states and their institutions were requested to support the flotilla in its humanitarian mission. This letter was also shared with the general public in accordance with the principle of transparency.

The flotilla components made a working plan in order to publicise the organization among the international public. They came together

for meetings in Istanbul, Athens and London and drafted a roadmap for their activities both before and after of the ships' departure.

## Determining ships for the flotilla

Following the public relations work of the organization, the flotilla components started taking necessary steps to purchase ships. All activities and related work were shared with the public through radio and TV programs, hand-outs, internet etc. Within this framework, IHH, which was responsible for the Turkish leg of the organization, announced in newspaper ads that ships were to be purchased for the flotilla (See document 6). While the work to buy ships was underway, subjects like the route the flotilla would follow and the characteristics of the port were also discussed. Rehabilitation work for the port of Gaza, which hadn't been used for years, was started in coordination with IHH and local institutions in Gaza. The



The humanitarian flotilla consisted of civilian initiatives that navigated in international waters and did not pose any threat or danger for the national security of any sovereign state.



purchase process for ships in Turkey was realized as follows: Allowances in kind were determining factors for the size and number of ships. The 3150-ton 'Gazze I' (formerly named Yunus Şirin) became the first ship purchased by IHH. During search for a passenger ship that would carry the activists, a ship named Mavi Marmara belonging Istanbul Sea Boats Inc. (IDO) was found. It was on sale. The Mavi Marmara, registered with Turkey Maritime Enterprises Inc. was handed over in 2005 to IDO, a subsidiary of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. Before the purchase was finalised, the opinion of Turk Loydu<sup>1</sup> was obtained about the Mavi Marmara. It used to navigate only in national waters; it was necessary to determine whether the ship would be seaworthy in international waters. An independent Conformity Assessment Organization was constituted by the Istanbul Maritime Under-Secretary to carry out a survey. Turk Loydu gave an affirmative answer. At the third tender for the ship was opened, IHH purchased the ship at a price of TL 1,810,000 (the ship's price was listed at TL 1,800,000). The ship's transfer operations took a month. In the meantime, the ship's machinery, deck, the bridge deck and water tanks at the bottom of the ship were made ready. The ship's maintenance and repair work was completed within a timeframe of one and half months and the ship was now ready to navigate in international waters. Food and water enough to feed every passenger for a

<sup>1</sup> Türk Loydu was founded in 1962 by The Chamber of Turkish Naval Architect and Marine Engineers, with the contribution of Association of the Insurance and Reinsurance Companies of Turkey, and the cooperation of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, the Chamber of Shipping, Istanbul Chamber of Industry etc. It is an independent, impartial, reliable, expert "National Classification, Certification and Conformity Assessment Organization". For detailed information visit: [www.turkloydu.org](http://www.turkloydu.org)

month was loaded onto the ship. The Mavi Marmara also took basic food supplies for the other ships of the flotilla along with ships departing from Turkey. In addition to this, medical supplies for simple diseases or for possible emergency situations that may arise at sea were also included in the cargo.

It was not in the flotilla organizers' plans to purchase a third ship but when large amounts of donations for the relief flotilla poured in, it was decided to purchase another ship. A 4,400-ton cargo ship, Defne Y, was bought. As well as donations in kind, a water gauge of 12-24 meter-length pontoons, which was required to unload the cargo from the ships to the port of Gaza, was loaded.



Survey is the name of an obligatory auditing done for ships that will navigate in international waters. It means that passenger ships from their floorings to seat coverings are ready to set sail and cargo ships are also ready to carry the weight. While these audits are held every two years for vehicles, ships are audited every five year. The standards for survey operation vary from country to country. Each of the ships in the Gaza Freedom Flotilla was subjected to survey inspections of the country they were registered in.



The organizers of the Turkish part of the flotilla, IHH joined the Gaza Freedom Flotilla with three ships. Two of those were cargo vessels and the third was a passenger ship. Those ships that had a capacity to carry 7,800 tons of humanitarian aid were purchased in consultation with experts in the area. As well as philanthropists from Turkey, donors particularly from Kuwait and Algeria made significant contributions for the ships, which were purchased entirely with such donations. The purchase of Gazze I was realized with the donations of Kuwaiti volunteers, while Algerian donors met 60% of the price of Defne Y.

gathered almost 700 volunteers from 37 countries - from Indonesia and Malaysia to South Africa, Sweden and the U.S.A., among others - representing people of different background, ethnicity, race, language and age in the pursuit of one common cause. Hundreds of people whose governments have ignored what has been happening in Palestine for reasons of realpolitik, took their place on board the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, just because they are human beings, in order to end the on-going embargo on Gaza. Immediately after announcement for the flotilla was made, a surge of applications followed; the boats of the flotilla and tons of humanitarian relief were ready through donations sent by the flotilla supporters. Gaza Freedom Flotilla experienced the brotherhood of diversity of the human family. Journalists, writers, academics, NGO volunteers, engineers, artists, shop owners, and housewives were among those that made up the group. For the first time in their life, some were going to sleep in a sleeping bag instead of a comfortable bed they were used to. For many, it was their first exposure to diversity of...

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