



WITNESSES of the FREEDOM FLOTILLA

INTERVIEWS WITH PASSENGERS

Zahide Tuba KOR





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- Interviews with Passengers -

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Zahide Tuba Kor (1980) was born in Istanbul, Turkey. She received her Bachelor's degree in Political Science and International Relations from Marmara University in 2003, and her Master's degree from the same university in 2007 with a thesis in International Relations titled "A Turning Point in Turkish-Syrian Relations: The Öcalan Crisis". She worked as an editor and a writer of a monthly magazine, *Anlayış*, for six years - which covered mainly politics, economics, foreign policy and society of Turkey, as well as world politics and economics. She has more than fifty articles published in various periodicals, especially in *Anlayış*. Her areas of interest are Turkish foreign policy, the Middle East (especially Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel), and history of religions and religious sects. The books and book chapters authored by her are:

Küresel Vicdanın Dilinden ÖZGÜRLÜK FİLOSU (WITNESSES of the FREEDOM FLOTILLA), Istanbul: İHH Kitap, May 2011.

Ortadoğu' nun Aynası LÜBNAN (Lebanon: The Mirror of the Middle East), Istanbul: İHH Yayınları, December 2009.

Siyonizm Düşünden İşgal Gerçeğine Filistin (Palestine: From Zionist Dreams to Occupation Reality), together with Fatma Tunc Yasar and Sevinç Alkan Özcan, Istanbul: İHH Yayınları, April 2009 (6th edition).

"Yahudi Kadının Modernleşme Tecrübesi ve İsrail Örneği (The Modernisation Experience of Jewish Women and the Case of Israel)", *Harf Harf Kadınlar*, (ed.) Nazife Şişman, Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2008.

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The profit of this book will be donated
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FOREWORD

The Gaza Freedom Flotilla brought people from all around the world together working to establish the reign of justice on the face of the earth. On it was an ensemble of the virtuous, who can at any given time adopt a position on the side of justice. This ensemble, which came together that day for Gaza, symbolising the world's conscience, would just as easily have stood by justice had it been the Israelis who were oppressed. More than seven hundred peace activists from almost forty different countries on the humanitarian aid flotilla who had set out to this journey in the name of humanity and who were carrying hope to Gaza, were attacked in international waters before the eyes of the entire world by Israeli soldiers, while only expecting to reach Gaza, singing songs of freedom.

The Gaza Freedom Flotilla, carrying humanitarian aid vital for Gaza and screaming out to the world humanity's hunger for justice, woke up to the morning of 31 May to Israeli soldiers' gun shots. During the attack to the Flotilla made up completely of civilians, nine Turkish citizens on board the *Mavi Marmara* lost their lives and more than fifty people were wounded. The Israeli Navy, which stopped the other vessels of the Flotilla using violent means as well, captured each and every passenger of the Freedom Flotilla and sent them to prison, seizing all the humanitarian aid as well as the vessels themselves.

There are leaders, events and works that make history; that lead generations, that open new eras, that become epic... There are strong voices who speak up against existing injustices, altering the course of history... The Gaza Freedom Flotilla may have failed to reach the Port of Gaza, yet it managed to fulfil a historic mission. The Flotilla showed all the injustices Palestinians have endured and the brutality of Israel to the world at first-hand; the Palestinian issue which was previously overshadowed by politics, and kept in the dark through media disinformation and manipulation is now being debated worldwide. And the

voices of those who refuse to accept injustices in the world are now stronger than ever.

This work, *Witnesses of the Freedom Flotilla*, is presented to the benefit of the public by İHH Kitap, the publishing house of the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (İHH) which took the initiative to organize the Gaza Freedom Flotilla within Turkey. This book presents a new perspective to the Israeli attack – that was watched live by the world on TV screens, and on which many television programmes and documentary films are made, many books are written – by making the first-hand witnesses of the attack speak. The book narrates the stories of people such as a wounded man who was shot by nine bullets on the top deck where the Israelis landed, a volunteer who lost her husband before her eyes, an activist who was beaten nearly to death by Israeli soldiers, a filmmaker who was going to shoot a documentary in Gaza, and other lovers of peace who joined the Flotilla from all corners of the world. It shares the most humane dimension of a humanitarian initiative, and fulfils a crucial mission by documenting the unique stories of the activists for leaving a mark in history. We are indebted to Zahide Tuba Kor who worked day and night with great devotion to share this important work with the Turkish and international public. Hoping this work – prepared in Turkish, English and Arabic editions – reaches all those with conscience in the world, and the quest for justice spreads to every corner of the world...

Attorney F. Bülent Yıldırım
President of the İHH

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INTRODUCTION

On the day of 31 May 2010, when conscientious people of the world were attacked in international waters, killed, wounded and taken captive, and when this mobilised the global conscience by taking the masses to the streets to protest the vicious attack, the idea of conducting interviews with the participants of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla to make the incident go down in history was conceived. However, after their arrival to Istanbul, I could only make four interviews since the participants were very busy at that time with medical checks, judicial process and so on. When the welcoming ceremony of the *Mavi Marmara* – on her arrival back from Israel seven months later – brought most of the Flotilla participants together in Istanbul in December, this work could be taken up once more. I began to make interviews first during the dinner for foreign guests – after the welcoming ceremony held in Sarayburnu, Istanbul, on 26 December 2010 – and then at the head office of the IHH for the next two days. By the end of three days, I was able to make interviews with thirteen foreign participants.

While editing a total of sixteen interviews conducted in June and December 2010, I got in touch through e-mail with some other noteworthy participants who were mentioned in the interviews. Every new interview led to new ones, thanks to the help of my friends in the IHH. I also had an opportunity to make a face-to-face interview with the leader of the Palestinians in 1948 territory (Israel) who happened to be in Istanbul for a programme at the time. Thus, I was able to make thirty-five interviews with the foreign participants of the Freedom Flotilla from all around the world, seventeen of which were face-to-face¹ and the rest (eighteen) through e-mail².

1 Face-to-face interviews are conducted: on 4 June 2010 with Laura Macdonald Stuart, Maryam Luqman Talib, and Paveen Yaqub; on 26 December 2010 with Dimitris Pleionis, Fatima Mohammadi, Haya Al Shatti, Laura Arau Crusellas, Manuel Espinar Tapial, and Osama Qashoo; on 27 December 2010 with Ahsan Shamruk, Alexandra Lort Phillips, Baboo Adem Zanghar, Nadeem Ahmed Khan, Nur Fitri Moeslim Taher, and Sarah Colborne; on 28 December 2010 with Shatha Barakat Bint Abdullatif; on 18 March 2011 with Sheikh Raed Salah.

2 Written interviews through e-mail are conducted with: David K. Schermerhorn (5 March), David Segarra (10 March), Edda Virginia Manga Otalora (2 March), Gadija Davids (29 March), Gene St.Onge (4 March), Hassan Ghani (12 February), Huwaida Arraf (18 March), Iara Lee (7 March), Inge Hoeger (15 April), Ismail Ali Nashwan and Mustafa

As I was about to finish editing the Turkish version of this work in May, upon the recommendation of the IHH, four more interviews with the Turkish citizens were added, all of which have very significant and remarkable details about the Flotilla attack. While Ayşe Sarioğlu, the reporter of a Turkish daily, *Taraf*, responded to my questions by e-mail; the interviews with Doctor Hamdi Osmanoglu, the wounded activist Mehmet Ali Zeybek, and the wife of a martyr Çiğdem Topçuoğlu were prepared by transcribing the footage that the IHH recorded previously for a documentary, and by revising them to fit in the context of the book.

Thirty-five of the thirty-nine interviews in the book are with the *Mavi Marmara* passengers while the other four are with passengers of the Greek boat, *Sfendoni*, and the American boat, Challenger 1. In these four interviews, you will read not only the stories of the Freedom Flotilla and the resistance methods used against the Israeli naval commandos on these boats, but also the little known stories of the first sea voyages to Gaza that began in August 2008; thanks to Dr. Paul Larudee (the person behind the missions of breaking the siege of Gaza by sea), Huwaida Arraf (the chairperson of the Free Gaza Movement that has been organizing these sea voyages since 2008), David K. Schermerhorn (who joined or supported most of the sea voyages to Gaza), and Gene St. Onge (who has been directly contributing to the rebuilding of Gaza through his engineering company) who made valuable contributions to the book with their interviews. Especially Dr. Larudee's account of his capture and imprisonment, which he wrote on 19 June 2010 for legal purposes, is a very interesting and important example of non-violent resistance... If you like to comprehend the process that led to the Freedom Flotilla chronologically, it would be advisable to begin reading the book with the interviews of the *Sfendoni* and Challenger 1 passengers.

In this book, you will see interviews with the activists from all around the world – from Arab countries to Europe, from Indonesia to Australia and New Zealand, from Venezuela to the United States and Canada, from the Republic of South Africa to Pakistan and Turkey – as well as with participants of various occupations – such as member of parliament, municipal councillor, academician, philologist, lawyer, doctor, engineer, journalist, documentary filmmaker, writer, imam and preacher, student,

Ismail Nashwan (17 March), Jerry Campbell (12 March), Kenneth O'Keefe (3 April), Kevin Neish (16 March), Nicci Enchmarch (21 March), Paul Larudee (16 March), Surya Fachrizal Aprianus Ginting (12 March), and Ouassima Ibn Salah (14 March).

housewife, peace and human rights activist, volunteer etc. You will read the stories of the Freedom Flotilla through the eyes of individuals representing the global conscience. You will find not only personal experiences of the participants but also their emotions and thoughts; in other words, “the harmony of action, emotion and thought”. This actually is the secret behind the success of the Freedom Flotilla and how it became a source of inspiration to so many people around the world.

The Gaza siege and the Palestinian issue – which gathered people from all walks of life, i.e. from different cultures, religions, nations, ideologies, occupations and ages – have created such a harmony of thought and emotion that it could be easily noticed by the similarities of the responses to questions. Presumably none of the problems that the world has gone through could ever bring such different people so close together.

The voice of this global conscience that has risen all around the world against the siege, occupation and injustice cannot be silenced and suppressed anymore by the methods Israel used to apply – i.e. defamation and violence. The inhumane and illegal methods Israel and its soldiers used against the participants of the Freedom Flotilla, – rather than intimidating and terrorising the organizers and passengers – appear to have encouraged them to set sail to Gaza much more enthusiastically once more. A clear sign of this is that a short time after arriving back to their countries, most of them began the preparations of the Freedom Flotilla II.

In this era of globalisation, Israel cannot continue its way by conducting policies leftover from the Cold War and by leaning on the Big Brother. Since the world has undergone a deep transformation, those states that cannot keep up with the changes have no choice but to either collapse or oblige to change sooner or later. Just as the Freedom Flotilla has become a source of inspiration in terms of “the power of the masses”, and thus, prepared the psychological ground for the mass uprising of the peoples in the Middle East against their warn-out and corrupt oppressive regimes, it will also be a driving force that undermines the “realpolitik” of Israel, that isolates it from the world, and thus, that obliges it to change in the mid to long run.

While asking questions to the Flotilla participants and preparing this book, there was only one motive aside from personal curiosity: leaving a mark in history. This is mainly because the history that we read and learn today is not the history of the righteous people but those of the

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- Ahsan Shamruk** Palestinian living in the United Kingdom, self-employed
- Alexandra Lort Phillips** British, social worker
- Ayşe Sarioğlu** Turkish citizen, reporter of a Turkish daily, *Taraf*, and M.A. student
- Baboo Adem Zanghar** Indian living in the United Kingdom, merchant
- Çiğdem Topçuoğlu** Turkish citizen, 2011 taekwondo champion, wife of martyr Cetin Topçuoğlu
- David K. Schermerhorn** U.S. citizen, activist and retired film and TV commercial producer
- David Segarra** Spanish living in Venezuela, director of documentary films
- Dimitris Pleionis** Greek, elected municipal councillor and representative of the *Ship to Gaza-Greece*
- Edda Virginia Manga Otalora** Swede of Colombian origin, historian and academician
- Fatima Mohammadi** American of Iranian origin, lawyer and activist
- Gadija Davids** South African, correspondent of *Radio 786*
- Gene St. Onge** U.S. citizen, consulting civil/structural engineer
- Hamdi Osmanoglu** Syrian-born Turkish citizen, specialist in dermatology and chief physician
- Hassan Ghani** Scot of Pakistani origin, correspondent of *PressTV*
- Haya Al Shatti** Kuwaiti, treasury-manager of a real estate firm
- Huwaida Arraf** Palestinian with American and Israeli citizenship; lawyer, the chairperson of the Free Gaza Movement, and co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement
- Iara Lee** Brazilian of Korean descent living in the U.S., documentary filmmaker and peace activist
- Inge Hoeger** German, politician and member of the Bundestag
- Ismail Ali Nashwan** Palestinian exiled to Jordan in 1956
- Jerry Campbell** Australian, student of nursing
- Kenneth O'Keefe** "World citizen" who renounced the U.S. citizenship, human rights and peace activist
- Kevin Neish** Canadian, activist and human rights observer
- Laura Arau Crusellas** Spanish, freelance journalist and documentary filmmaker
- Laura Macdonald Stuart** British, housewife and activist
- Manuel Espinar Tapial** Spanish, freelance journalist and activist, coordinator of *Rumbo a Gaza*
- Maryam Luqman Talib** Australian of Sri Lankan origin, student of pharmacy
- Mehmet Ali Zeybek** Turkish citizen, pharmacist
- Mustafa Ismail Nashwan** Jordanian of Palestinian origin, Imam and preacher
- Nadeem Ahmed Khan** Pakistani, lawyer and chairman of the Khubaib Foundation
- Nicci Enchmarch** New Zealander living in the United Kingdom, project management consultant and activist
- Nur Fitri Moeslim Taher** Indonesian, humanitarian relief volunteer and freelance writer
- Osama Qashoo** Palestinian living in the United Kingdom, award-winning documentary filmmaker and peace activist
- Ouassima Ibn Salah** Moroccan living in Turkey, correspondent of *Al Jazeera Net* and Moroccan daily *Al Massae*
- Paul Larudee** Iranian-born U.S. citizen, philologist and peace activist, co-founder of the Free Palestine Movement and the Free Gaza Movement
- Paveen Yaqub** British of Pakistani origin, peace activist
- Sarah Colborne** British, director of Palestine Solidarity Campaign
- Surya Fachrizal Aprianus Ginting** Indonesian, journalist
- Sheikh Raed Salah** Palestinian, leader of the Islamic Movement in Palestine '48
- Shatha Barakat Bint Abdullatif** Syrian, Arabic teacher and writer, institute director



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