



GAZA – The Conscience of the World

When political and religious leaders fail to take a stand for justice, ordinary people must do it. Western government leaders are clearly unwilling to implement the requirements of international law and give the Palestinians their just rights. The mantle is now on the shoulders of grassroots people who, increasingly, the world over, are pushing for a nonviolent solution to the conflict over Palestine.

The small flotilla carrying nearly 700 people from some 30 countries was on its way to break the siege of the Gaza Strip, where one and a half million Palestinians have been subjected to a harsh blockade imposed by the Israeli government for the last four years. They were bringing with them educational supplies, cement, building materials, wheelchairs, prefabricated homes, water purifiers, food, children's toys, medicine and medical equipment.

Israeli forces attacked the flotilla in international waters, killing nine and injuring up to 60 people. This fits a familiar pattern: Israel has a habit of meeting resistance with disproportionate violent force to nip opposition in the bud, impose fear, and suppress any thoughts of further resistance. The apparent Israeli motto is that for every problem with the Palestinians there is always a military solution. This has been the shortcut to suppression and control; and Israel does it in the name of security, under the guise of its right to self-defense, and without any critique from western governments.

The freedom flotilla has shamed heads of state and church leaders in its determination to break the unjust and oppressive siege of the Gaza Strip. In world public opinion, Israel is becoming a pariah; its lies and deceptions are increasingly exposed and threadbare. Palestine has become the litmus test for truth and justice and Gaza has become the conscience of the world. The crucial question is, where do people stand? Do we stand for freedom and liberation of the oppressed in Gaza or on the side of the siege and humanitarian disaster?

The disciples asked Jesus, why couldn't we drive out the evil spirit? (Mark 9:28) Jesus said, such an evil spirit cannot be cast out except with prayer and with

fasting. We will continue to pray and fast in order to drive out the evil spirit of occupation and oppression. The great prophet Isaiah cried out that the fast God chooses, is "...to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" (Isaiah 58:6) This is what we have been witnessing through the challenge of the flotilla. We believe that the spirit of God is working through true peace activists, who practice their prayers in direct nonviolent actions for peace and whose fast is the doing of justice.

Israel is frustrated that growing numbers of people and organizations, local and international (Christian, Jewish, Muslim and secular) are daring to lift up their voices and engage in nonviolent challenges of Israeli injustice. In fact, since Israel's war on Gaza, one report after another has condemned Israel and documented its crimes against the Palestinians -- UN Human Rights Council Goldstone Report, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Crisis Group.

In the absence of serious determination from the USA and others to end the illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories (including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip), we urge men and women - young and old, religious and secular - to use every nonviolent means available to end the siege of Gaza, remove the yoke of occupation and work for the freedom and liberation of Palestine and all its people.

God will loose the bonds of injustice, undo the thongs of the yoke and let the oppressed go free. We believe the dawn of justice is near.

Sabeel Jerusalem
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www.sabeel.org