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regarding-israel%C2%B4s-piracy-and-policy-siege

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Letter from Ship to Gaza Sweden to the EU regarding Israel's piracy and policy of siege

Pressmeddelande Skapad 28/10 2012 kl 19:01

Following letter was today sent from Ship to Gaza Sweden to Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

To the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Once again the Israeli government has acted contrary to international law. The boarding of the Finnish-flagged sailing ship S/V Estelle took place in international waters. The ship was forcibly taken to the Israeli seaport of Ashdod. Both passengers and crew were subjected to violence, detained and forced to undergo severe and persistent questioning by the Israeli security service, on the basis of being accused of having illegally entered Israel.

We much appreciate the efforts made by the Swedish diplomatic representatives in Israel to achieve the release of those detained, and the help the latter received in leaving Israel. We also noted with satisfaction that the Swedish and Finnish diplomatic representatives in Israel protested at the fact that Israel, contrary to the Vienna Convention, for a considerable length of time refused them the opportunity to meet their citizens who had been detained.

But we feel that it is incumbent upon the European Union publicly to draw the attention of the international community to the crime that Israel committed, and continues to commit, with its collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza, and demand that the Israeli government immediately takes action to return the hijacked sailing ship, its cargo, its medical equipment and stocks of medicines, and the personal effects belonging to the passengers and crew, which were stolen when the ship was boarded and they were detained on Israeli territory.

We therefore suggest that the European Union and its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy should protest against the following:

- that the Israeli navy boarded and hijacked the ship in international waters,
- that the Israeli navy used disproportionate physical force against the passengers and crew, including the use of tasers, against at least thirteen people, including several members of parliament,
- that the Israeli navy tore down the Finnish flag from the ship and replaced it with the Israeli flag,
- that the S/V Estelle was forcibly and with violence taken from international waters to Israeli

territory,

- that all those on board the S/V Estelle were detained and subjected to severe and persistent questioning, threats and humiliating treatment, including in the form of repeated body searches,
- that passengers and crew were accused of having illegally entered Israeli territory.

We assume that the European Union will demand that the Israeli government immediately return the S/V Estelle ship to its owner, the Swedish-owned but Finnish-registered company Northern Breeze OY, in the condition the ship was in before it was hijacked, and without further delay return all personal effects, mobile telephones, cameras, computers, etc. that were confiscated from the passengers and crew.

We also assume that the European Union will be vigilant in ensuring that the cargo for which Ship to Gaza has Bills of Lading (41 tonnes of cement) is not discharged without the owner's consent.

During the Israeli security service's questioning, it emerged that they were aware of information concerning the people who had been detained, and their circumstances, that would indicate that this had been acquired by means of unlawful spying activities on the part of the Israeli state, or alternatively that the Swedish security police had handed over information to their Israeli colleagues. Whichever is the case, these must be seen as extremely serious acts against Swedish citizens and we assume that the government will take the actions required to establish how and/or from where the Israelis collected their information, and bring those responsible to account.

The European Union and we at Ship to Gaza are agreed that the Israeli blockade of Gaza must be ended. But it is clear that words alone achieve nothing. Our action therefore not only points the finger at the Israeli blockade of Gaza, but also at the fact that the European Union's policy in this matter has been shown to be inadequate. As long as the EU or national governments do not apply pressure on the Israeli government to end the blockade, in practice passivity means acceptance of the fact that 1.6 million inhabitants of Gaza are to continue to live in a prison, dependent on the aid provided by the international community.

It would be an excellent occasion to show that the European Union treat everyone equally; the EU sends navy forces out against pirates off the Somali coast. Is the EU prepared to protect shipping in the Mediterranean against the Israeli state's pirate activities?

Stockholm 2012, October 27

For Ship to Gaza Sweden

Dror Feiler, Mattias Gardell, Ann Ighe & Victoria Strand

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