

Breaking the Siege on Gaza: In the Spirit of Rachel Corrie and Mavi Marmara

Conference Honours Martyrs, Sends Message of Hope

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KUALA LUMPUR — Yesterday was unlike any ordinary Sunday as hundreds of visitors — locals or foreigners — thronged an international conference organised by Perdana Global Peace Organisation (PGPO) at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC).

The conference Breaking the Siege: In the Spirit of Rachel Corrie and Mavi Marmara began at 9am and drew many peace-loving people from all walks of life, many of whom stayed until it ended at 6pm.

PGPO chairman Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said: “We are gathered here not only to honour the Turkish martyrs, who were brutally slaughtered by Israeli commandos on the MV Mavi Marmara, but also to counter the lies and propaganda by Israel and the Zionist-controlled international mass media claiming the passengers, specifically the martyrs, were terrorists and the killings justified.

“More importantly, we must send a message of hope and solidarity to the Palestinians that the peace-loving people of the world will never abandon them, come what may, and we will stand shoulder-to-shoulder in their struggle for liberation.

“The Muslim world continues to be taken in by (the United States) President Obama’s rhetoric he is committed to change and he is for peace.

“His actions contradict his spoken words. Upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Obama then escalated the war in Afghanistan, a war started by President George W. Bush. It is not surprising the UN chose not to allow a debate on Malaysia’s resolution condemning Israel for its dastardly acts.”

The conference was hosted by renowned television personality Wan Zaleha Radzi, and attracted several politicians, media practitioners, bloggers, students and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Among those present were Parit MP Mohd Nizar Zakaria, former Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kasim, Suhaimi Sulaiman of Bernama TV and film critic Mansor Puteh.

There were three sessions conducted with international and local panelists at the conference. The audience were initially exposed to the life of the Palestinians under the Israeli occupation with a multimedia presentation at the beginning of the conference.

During the first session “Freedom Flotilla — Eyewitness Accounts”, five of the panelists who participated in the Freedom Flotilla shared their views on what transpired during the tragedy of Mavi Marmara and MV Rachel Corrie mission.

They were former UN assistant secretary-general and PGPO international advisory panel member Denis J. Halliday, international activist onboard Rachel Corrie Jenny Graham, Turkish IHH’s (Insani Yardım Vakfı, Humanitarian Relief Fund, or IHH) Dr Hassan Hüseyin Üsyal who was onboard Mavi Marmara, Astro Awani broadcast journalist Ashwad Ismail and University of Ottawa Centre for Research on Globalisation Prof Michel Chossudovsky.

The first session was moderated by International Trade and Industry Deputy Minister Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir and it focused on Israeli plans to stop the Freedom Flotilla ships.

Also discussed was how the passengers of both Mavi Marmara and Rachel Corrie were determined to get the humanitarian aid across as well as to send the message to break the siege, demanding the blockade in Gaza to be lifted.

In the second session, the audience were again presented the daily account of the Palestinians. International activist and leader of Rachel Corrie Derek Graham and foreign relations officer of Gaza House of Parliament Mohammed D. Radwan called for the international community to support the Palestinians.

“No one can forget the heroes of Mavi Marmara and Rachel Corrie. Gaza is a small place, full of meaning and colour, but it is all dark. Gaza is like a prison and the Israelis seem to have thrown the key away,” Mohammed said.

The final and third session of the conference was moderated by Dr Mahathir himself. The panelists were Datin Seri Paduka Rosmah Mansor, wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, ambassador of Turkey to Malaysia Serap Ataay, and deputy head of mission Embassy of Iran and Chief Representative of the League of Arab States Mission in New Delhi Dr Ahmed Salem Saleh Alwasih.

The session, titled A Call to Action, saw various plans of actions and ideas being discussed to continue with the humanitarian effort by the Freedom Flotilla mission.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who delivered the closing speech at the conference, said: “Malaysia will request the UN General Assembly to seek an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice.”

He also reaffirmed Malaysia’s stand to strongly urge members of the UN to reconvene the 10th Emergency of the General Assembly to deliberate on the attack of the Israeli Defence Force on Freedom Flotilla.

What the panelists say

Michel Chossudovsky

“I can unequivocally say the US was also behind the attack. The president would be briefed daily about the military operations by the intelligence and Defence Secretary. The issue of Gaza is not only with regards to political but also economical matters. Many did not know Gaza has substantial reserves of natural gas and it is one of the reasons why Israel would

not want to forgo this land.”

Dr Hassan Huseyin Usyal

“It is such an unacceptable situation to be in, for any peace activists to be attacked when we are only acting for a humanitarian cause. Of course, I have never thought it could happen to the Freedom Flotilla. But it did. It was the Israelis who attacked and killed us, and claimed we had weapons when we had none with us.”

Dennis J. Halliday

“The UN is a tragic embarrassment as it has failed the Palestinians and to highlight the plight of the oppressed. Our Freedom Flotilla mission is not only about humanitarian aid, it is also about breaking the siege which has brought the Palestinians to the worst state any human being can endure. If we can pressure the Americans to back off from supporting the Israelis, then the whole world would eventually listen. The Israelis have considered themselves to be exceptional just like the Americans, and we need to stop that.”

Jenny Graham

“To be actively aware and involved in the whole Palestinian issue, you have to do your own research. Do not take my words alone. Read, get yourself educated with the whole issue and the history of the matter. Do not just take whatever it is available in the mainstream media. If you do not know, ask.”

Datin Seri Paduka Rosmah Mansor

“The spirit of the Freedom Flotilla and the people who lost their lives should not be allowed to dissipate. Their spirit must live on and continue to inspire others to forge ahead through peaceful means to assist the people of Palestine. We have the moral obligation to say no to aggression, no to oppression, no to abuse and torture, and especially no to the mistreatment of women and children.”

Derek Graham

“It is not the government which is going to make the difference but the people of the world who are going to bring the Zionists to stop their mistreatment of the Palestinians. Thanks to all the Malaysians, because of the relentless support and reports on Rachel Corrie, it has managed to keep the people on the ship safe. We are getting closer towards our own victory in obtaining the world’s awareness.”

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