Challenging the Blockade: Canadian Humanitarian Boat To Gaza

By Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East
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Montreal, August 20, 2010 – The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) is encouraging Canadians to send mail to Gaza aboard a Canadian boat to be sent there in the fall under the humanitarian *Canada Boat to Gaza* project. The Israeli government is currently preventing other countries' postal services and the Palestinian Postal Service from dealing with each other directly. It announced on July 20 that it would not allow international postal service to Gaza. Gazans have been without international mail since then. So far, Canada Post has failed to find an alternative route to deliver Canadian mail to Gaza, which is surrounded by a 40-foot iron wall with only three entry points, two controlled by Israel and a third by Egypt.

The union's statement has drawn considerable response from the public. According to union sources, 80 to 90 percent of the comments support the union's position. However, in an August 19 article, the *Toronto Sun* -long hostile to Canada's unions – implied that CUPW's position contradicted its campaign to insist that national postal services, rather than private companies, be the ones to handle international mail. CUPW President Denis Lemelin disagrees, saying "we are still defending public mail services. This boat is sponsored by the public, which is aware that the people of Gaza are already suffering, and that the cutting off of international mail only intensifies that suffering." Lemelin urges people around the world to pressure Israel to stop blocking postal service to Gaza, saying "restoring international mail service to Gaza should be the first step in lifting the blockade completely." Faced with international criticism, Israeli authorities are now claiming that they are blocking mail service to Gaza because the Palestinian Postal Service has not yet appointed a replacement for the chief of mail transfers. He was recently arrested by Israeli forces.

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) welcomes CUPW's position. "It is heartening that a Canadian union is raising its voice against this cruel interference with Gazans' postal service," says CJPME President Thomas Woodley. He notes that international law stipulates that people in an occupied territory have the right to communicate with the outside world.

Canada Boat to Gaza is being supported by dozens of Canadian human rights groups, CUPW, CJPME, as well as individuals such as Kevin Neish – a Canadian survivor of the May 31 Israeli attack on the Mavi Marmara aid ship – and retired US colonel Ann Wright, a Freedom Flotilla survivor.

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