

Gaza Flotilla Activist Faces Death Threats

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Haneen Zuabi, a Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset, has been sworn at by parliamentary colleagues and received death threats since disembarking on Monday

While other activists from the [Gaza](#) aid flotilla have returned home, one is left facing death threats and abuse in [Israel](#). Haneen Zuabi, a Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset who was aboard the Mavi Marmara, is now under armed protection after nearly 500 people signed up to a Facebook page calling for her execution.

During a heated parliamentary session yesterday Zuabi was sworn at and then shoved out of the chamber amid shouts of "Go to Gaza, traitor".

The 41-year-old member of the Arab nationalist party Balad has also received death threats by phone and mail. "I am not scared," she said, speaking from her home town of Nazareth in northern Israel. "This is inherent here, it is not something that started yesterday. It is just harder and harsher now."

Zuabi faces growing hostility for taking part in the Gaza aid flotilla, amid a climate of rage at what has been portrayed in Israel as a premeditated attack upon its soldiers by armed activists aboard the boats.

"Israel wanted many deaths to terrorise us and to send a message that no future aid convoys should try to break the siege of Gaza," she told journalists this week.

Zuabi said that naval boats surrounded the Mavi Marmara and fired on it before soldiers abseiled aboard from a helicopter. She went below to the ship's hold and said that, within minutes, two dead passengers were brought inside, followed by two more who had been seriously wounded.

Soldiers refused her requests for medical assistance for the injured passengers, who died shortly after.

Zuabi - known in Israel as an articulate Hebrew speaker - said that soldiers specifically asked her to translate their instructions. At first, she refused. "I shouted back, 'Why didn't you ask for my help before you murdered these people?'"

But she realised that such assistance could prevent further violence. "My fear was that miscommunication and panic could lead to more deaths," she said. "Everyone on the boat was terrified, screaming and crying and I felt a sense of responsibility towards them."

Zuabi spent the next few hours conveying the Israeli soldiers' instructions to the passengers as they were searched, while also relaying concern over injured passengers and requests for water, medicine or to pray.

Disembarking with the others at Ashdod port on Monday, Zuabi, who has parliamentary immunity, was interrogated three times before being freed. The remaining four Palestinian citizens of Israel aboard the aid boats were released from Ashkelon prison this morning, but remain under house arrest until next week. They have not been charged.

Having survived a situation in which she'd factored a "50% chance to come out alive", Zuabi said she is now facing a different threat, "of racist, illegitimate ideas that have turned violent".

Zuabi was elected last year and, as the first female Knesset member on an Arab party list, views her support for the Free Gaza campaign as part of a wider fight for democracy, race and gender equality in Israel.

She said she cannot yet allow herself to process the violent events aboard the Mavi Marmarawhat happened. "I can't forget the images of the dead, but I haven't cried for them yet. I have to stay strong in this climate of threats against me."

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