

Greece Blocks Freedom Flotilla II Departure to Gaza

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

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Montreal, July 2, 2011 — On Friday July 1 the Greek government announced that it was prohibiting the departure from Greek ports of any ships, Greek or foreign, for Gaza. As of 5 p.m. EST July 1, the Canadian Boat to Gaza, the Tahrir — one of the 15 boats in Freedom Flotilla II — was being prevented from leaving the port of Agios Nicolaos, Crete. On Wednesday Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu had asked his Greek counterpart, George Papandreou, to stop the aid flotilla from departing Greece for Gaza. Greek port authorities boarded the Tahrir Friday and seized its licence. Canadian officials have not commented on the incident, although dozens of Canadians are aboard the Tahrir.

Freedom Flotilla II's aim is to peacefully challenge Israel's blockade of Gaza, which violates international law and inflicts grave hardship on Palestinians. However, as noted by Israeli newspaper Haaretz, over the last 18 months Netanyahu has dramatically strengthened ties with Papandreou. Netanyahu recently implored European leaders to provide financial aid to Greece. Greece is currently rocked by a financial crisis and popular protests against Papandreou's proposed austerity measures to deal with it. Greece's decision to prevent ships from leaving Greek ports for Gaza may be an indication that the Greek PM is reciprocating Netanyahu's gesture.

"We remind the Greek and Canadian leaders that it is the blockade that violates international law, and not Freedom Flotilla II's peaceful attempt to challenge it," says Thomas Woodley, President of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East. CJPME notes that Greece's statement banning the departure of ships did not provide any explanation for the ban — and certainly no legal justification for it. CJPME and its supporters expect the Canadian government to take all steps possible to protect the Canadians aboard the Tahrir, and to protect the rights of this Canadian boat.

In addition to immobilizing the Tahrir, Greek authorities forced the Audacity of Hope — the US boat in the flotilla — back to shore Friday shortly after it had left a Greek port. Earlier this week, flotilla activists reported that the Irish and Swedish ships participating in the flotilla had been sabotaged, in Turkish and Greek ports respectively. Israeli authorities have refused to comment on allegations that Israel was responsible for damage to the two vessels.

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