

Perpetrators of the Mavi Marmara attack should be punished, Gaza blockade should be lifted

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Press release from the joint news conference of IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation and the families of Mavi Marmara martyrs

All the state and government officials being mainly esteemed President of Turkey, Abdullah Gül, esteemed Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and esteemed Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu showed a praiseworthy attitude and made great efforts in the aftermath of the Israeli attack against Mavi Marmara that was a part of an international aid flotilla on 31 May 2010 which aimed to break the blockade on Gaza. Here, we would like offer our thanks for their efforts and mention that they have proved very satisfactory for the victim families, IHH Humanitarian Relief Organization, other non-governmental organizations that supported the Freedom Flotilla as well as all the volunteers from across 36 countries of the world in the Flotilla.

The report on UN on the flotilla, the Goldstone report, statements of UN related institutions and human rights organizations admit and declare in clear terms that there is an ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza and Israel perpetuates the blockade in an illegitimate and illegal way. Many civilian efforts have been made so far across the world to end the illegitimate blockage of Israel on Gaza.

Through the attack on the Flotilla which aimed to take humanitarian aid to Gaza which suffers from a humanitarian crisis caused by Israel's blockade, Israel has violated international law and human rights by committing heavy crimes such as wilful killing, torture and maltreatment of persons, violating persons' physical integrity rights, detaining and arresting persons arbitrarily, confiscating persons' belongings, restricting freedom of expression and similar other crimes.

A report prepared by a commission, set up by the UN to investigate the attack, and approved by the UN Human Rights Council said: "The conduct of the Israeli military and other personnel toward the flotilla passengers was not only disproportionate to the occasion but demonstrated levels of totally unnecessary and incredible violence. It betrayed an unacceptable level of brutality." Noting that such brutal treatment of persons can never be legitimized or defended out of security or any other concerns, the report said such acts of Israel has seriously violated human rights law and the international law.

The UN report also showed that the activists on the Mavi Marmara, without any doubt, aimed to take humanitarian aid to Gaza. Although the Israeli raid on the Mavi Marmara drew condemnation from all around the world and the UN report revealed its use of disproportionate force, Israel opted to give awards to its soldiers who deliberately

committed murders and directed accusations to peace activists and organizers of the aid campaign for Gaza.

As the aforementioned report suggests, all those who are responsible for this attack should account for their actions and be given the punishment they deserve so that justice can be delivered. The crimes committed by Israel should not go unpunished. Otherwise, it will not only be the conscience of the victims or their families that will be shaken but that of the entire humanity. In this regard, the investigation process in Turkey should be completed more speedily and effectively and the prospects of the criminals' trial in Turkey should be taken into consideration. This is a demand and expectation of all the Flotilla activists from 36 countries of the world.

Turkey's demands from Israel and the efforts it has made to ensure the fulfillment of its demands has received appreciation from us and the entire world. Israel's offering an apology to Turkey over the flotilla attack and paying compensations to the victims are Turkey's main demands, which are frequently brought up these days. Israel committed a crime against humanity. It should offer an apology to the entire humanity not only to the victims, organizers of the flotilla or the families of the martyr.

None of the crimes mentioned above can be forgiven by law through payment of compensation. No legal system punishes the perpetrators of a willful murder only through payment of a compensation. As long as the blockade on Gaza is not lifted, a goal for which activists sacrificed their lives, justice will not be fully served. Israel's offering an apology and paying compensation to victims will not mean that it has lifted the Gaza blockade and it is Israel's legal responsibility to make up for the damage it caused.

We would like to remind the officials who have taken the public reaction into consideration since the day of the attack to always keep in mind the public' sensitivity and the sacred goal of those on board the flotilla. No matter what takes place in the international arena and no matter what the international circumstances are, those who committed the aforementioned crimes should be tried by the independent Turkish judiciary and given the necessary punishments. Every passing day with Israel's insistence to continue its blockade on Gaza despite international reactions and reports declaring it "guilty," means a show of disrespect to the memory of the nine Flotilla martyrs who sacrificed their lives for this goal.

The only thing that will please the hearts of the martyrs, the martyr families and the wounded is not Israel's offering an apology for its cruelty and paying a compensation to the victims but it is the saving of desperate Palestinian and Gaza people from the Israeli occupation and their reunion with their freedom.

As a result:

- 1- A new flotilla that will be sent to Gaza on 31 May 2011 should see that the blockage on Gaza has been lifted or is about to be lifted.
- 2- Israel should account for the following crimes
 - a. Wilful killing
 - b. Torture, humiliating and inhumane treatment of persons
 - c. Wilful tormenting of persons
 - d. Violating persons' physical integrity rights and damaging persons' health severely
 - e. Arbitrary detainment and arrestment of persons
 - f. Restriction of freedom of expression

g. Confiscation of personal belongings

3- Israel should confess to having committed these crimes and offer an apology to those on board the Flotilla, the injured, the families of the martyrs, Turkey and to the entire world.

4- After finding out the reasons that slow down the investigation process in Turkey, the trial process should be speedily started here, an arrest warrant should be issued for the criminals and they should be punished.

5- Israel should pay a big amount of compensation for committing these crimes which would be treated as casus belli under normal circumstances.

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