

SOS Message: 'Israel Kidnapped Participants of Freedom Flotilla'

By [The New Arab](#)

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Featured image: Al Awda with snow mountain Fjords by Elizabeth Murray

A desperate SOS message was released by crew onboard a Norwegian-flagged flotilla that was [intercepted](#) by Israel on Sunday, as activists attempts to break a more than decade-long blockade of the [Gaza Strip](#) failed.

National Director of the Unite Union New Zealand representative on the International Freedom Flotilla to Gaza, Mike Treen, announced the hijacking of the boat by Israeli naval forces in a video.

He claimed the flotilla participants have been kidnapped by Israel, in a pre-recorded message, and alleged that Israel had violated international maritime law by launching the "attack" on the flotilla.

"If you are listening to this message it is because the al-Awda of the international flotilla to Gaza has been hijacked in international waters and the participants kidnapped by the Israeli military forces," he said in a video message.

"I ask for this message to be passed onto the Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand Mr Winston Peters so he can take action to release the participants of the flotilla and also to ensure that the aid we were carrying to Gaza is delivered."

Activists were [hoping](#) the flotilla would reach the besieged Gaza Strip on Sunday.

Breaking the siege

The [Freedom Flotilla](#) set sail in May for the Gaza Strip to challenge Israel's decade-old blockade of the besieged territory.

One of the vessels, al-Awda, was named to commemorate the [70th anniversary of the al-Nakba](#) ("The Catastrophe), in which more than 700,000 Palestinians fled or were forcibly expelled from their homes during the establishment of the Israeli state.

This year's freedom flotilla was deployed just weeks after Israeli forces [opened fire](#) on demonstrators in Gaza protesting for the right of return, killing more than 60.

“The blockade of Gaza is in its 11th year. It is such a gross violation of international law that it can be characterised as a crime against humanity,” participant Mikkel Grüner, a Danish national who is city councillor in Bergen, Norway, said at the time the flotilla set sail.

Volunteers joined the [multinational fleet](#) for different legs of the journey, with a select group of crew assigned to participate in the final run to Gaza.

The flotilla schedule was kept secret to protect the crew. In the past, mechanical failures have affected previous flotilla attempts, with allegations Israel may have tampered with the ships.

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