

“We Are Committed to Sailing to Gaza - Ahoy!”

An Interview with Hedy Epstein and Greta Berlin

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Hedy Epstein and Greta Berlin, two among other personalities promoting the project, “Sailing a boat to Gaza” explain, in the interview they gave to Silvia Cattori, why the boat “Free Gaza” will not sail this summer as initially planned, but next spring.



(Sam Tsohonis)

Silvia Cattori : Last May you had announced that you were going to sail for Gaza in August, 2007 [1]. Why has the date for trip been moved to the spring of 2008?

Greta Berlin : There are three main reasons.

First. We moved the date, because we simply don't have the money to buy the boats that we need.

Second, we realized that many of the logistics such as registering the boat, getting insurance for the trip and finding a committed captain and crew were going to take longer.

And, of course, the most important reason to move the date is because finally we decided to coordinate the action with the 60th anniversary of the “Nakba”. [2]

Silvia Cattori : Hadn't you a responsibility in respect of the people suffering siege in Gaza that reckoned on the arrival of a boat to mobilize the public opinion? If your departure is postponed, won't they be disappointed?

Greta Berlin : We are determined to carry out this project. In the past year, dozens of us have worked hard, and we don't intend to stop.

Hedy Epstein : We are more committed than ever. We don't want to disappoint anyone, including ourselves.

Silvia Cattori : Are you satisfied with the support you've received from the Palestinian and other solidarity groups?

Greta Berlin : Many of us from around the world have been asked to speak about the project. We've spoken to groups from San Francisco to the UK. Most of the groups who've asked us to speak about the project are still in the US, and we'd be delighted if other solidarity groups from other countries would contact us as well.

Silvia Cattori : What about the response from the media? Have they written about your project?

Greta Berlin : We've had tremendous support from the Internet journalists.

We were quite delighted to find that even the Israel National News wrote an article about us. Here is what the spokesperson said when asked about the trip.

"Will the Israeli Navy attempt to halt the ship and send it back where it came from?" One security official answered that there were a number of factors that would go into the final decision, but that it was very likely Israel would choose not to get involved. And he concluded with disdain: "If these people want to take their...vacations in "Hamastan", then I say good health to them". [3]

Hedy Epstein : Several of us have also been contacted by the Arab press and the Muslim media, who have written, and will continue to write about the project.

Silvia Cattori : After your project has been initiated, the political context has completely changed. Gaza is suffering now not only because of war imposed by the occupation, but also because of the "war" against Hamas launched by the Palestinian President Abbas. In this context in which the great powers have completely turned away from Gaza, aren't you worried to be accused of taking sides with a movement qualified as "terrorist"?

Greta Berlin : The world is busy starving the Palestinians of Gaza into submission, simply because they exercised their human right to vote democratically for the party they wanted in power. I find it obscene that, just because the US, Israel, the EU don't like the party's goals, they are suddenly called 'terrorists.' Israel funded Hamas back in the 1970s as a counter to Arafat's secular government. Why is Hamas, then, suddenly a terrorist group when they are resisting occupation?

Hedy Epstein : In the case of the US, we have dealt with numerous so-called terrorist organizations, such as The Stern Gang, the Irgun, and the Haganah, the original terrorists in the Middle East. They all later turned up in the Israeli government, holding office from the top down.

We all know that the Israeli authorities have a total control of land, air and sea space, leaving the people in outdoor prisons. In some ways what we are doing is to test the 'veracity of their lie' that they have left Gaza.

Gaza is submitted to an inhuman blockade. In 2000, before the second "Intifada", (uprising) Gaza fishermen were catching 823 tons of fish per month to feed their families and sell in

the market. After Israel closed Gaza and refused to allow the men to fish, they are barely able to catch 50 tons a month, not enough to feed their families or to sell. And, the fish that they can fish are tiny, and fishing so close to the coast destroys the spawning cycle.

Greta Berlin : The “Oslo agreement” says the Palestinians are allowed to go out six miles from the coast to fish. Israel won’t even let them get into their boats without shooting at them and destroying their boats. The Israeli military have killed several of these men over the past two years. [4]

Silvia Cattori : What do you say to those Jewish groups who are saying this project is “anti-Semitic” and you should concentrate on going to Darfur or other areas instead of picking on Israel?

Hedy Epstein : The American Jewish community is already doing a good job of handling the situation in Darfur by ‘donating money’. They project their guilt onto those of us who are advocating for peace and justice for the Palestinians instead of owning up to what is being done in our (Jewish) names. Projects like Darfur are primarily run by Zionist organizations who want to sidetrack the real issue of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians.

Greta Berlin : Listen, we Americans fund this occupation of Palestine. We send Israel \$10 million a DAY to occupy, kill, starve, humiliate and drive out a native population in favor of white European colonists. We have a moral obligation to concentrate on Israel, because we have been Israel’s primary enabler in this tragedy.

Silvia Cattori : What is your next move now to surmount the obstacles to completing this project?

Greta Berlin : We’re doing everything we can to publicize the project and to raise money for the boats. We need close to \$250’000 to buy at least two or three of them, and, in the space of about two months, we have collected close to \$30’000. So we know it can be done, if everyone reading this interview and others like it, will contribute by going to our website, www.freegaza.org, and clicking on DONATE.

Silvia Cattori : If, for some reasons, this project would not materialize?

Hedy Epstein : If this would happen – what we do not believe – we would give the collected money to humanitarian projects in Gaza. There will, alas, be no lack of projects to fund as long as the world continues to starve the population of Gaza.

Notes

[1] <http://www.counterpunch.org/cattori06072007.html>

<http://www.palestinechronicle.com/story-06140794938.htm>

[2] The Nakba (cataclysm) of 1948 who saw the mass deportation of nearly a million Palestinians from their cities and villages, massacres of civilians, and the razing to the ground of hundreds of Palestinian villages from the Jews arriving from Europe.

[3] www.israelnationalnews.com July, 2007

[4] <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article6557.html>

Article in french : « [Nous sommes déterminés à lever la voile pour Gaza](#) »

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