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Email Alert

## EYEWITNESSES: ISRAEL ATTACKED ALL THE SHIPS VIOLENTLY

By Rev. Ted Pike with Christina Elford  
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Survivors of Israel's attack on the "Free Gaza" flotilla are now sharing their accounts of the atrocities that took place in international waters. The eyewitness testimony of passengers from all five ships plainly contradicts Israel's claim that its commandos merely acted in self-defense ("[In their own words: Survivor testimonies from flotilla 31 May 2010](#)").

### What Really Happened?

- **Free Mediterranean** : "Commandos were already using teargas and firing live ammunition as they hit the deck," says Michalis Grigoropoulos, a peace activist from Greece. "We did not resist at all, we couldn't even if we had wanted to... Then they used electroshock weapons on some activists."

- **Challenger I** : Fiachra O Luain, from Ireland, "I saw what they did. I was on the bow of the *Challenger I* and there was live gunfire straight away from below and from the helicopters. One of the men was shot in the head. Another man was shot with a bullet right between his eyes at point blank range."

American Huwaida Arraf says, "They started beating people. My head was smashed against the ground and they stepped on my head. They later cuffed me and put a bag over my head. They did that to everybody."

Shane Dillon of Ireland describes the commandos using "stun guns, tasers, assaulting people with the butt ends of rifles, pushing people to the ground and standing on them."

Alex Harrison, UK activist: "We saw the helicopter come down and we heard the beginnings of the opening of live fire. I didn't fully take in that they were using live fire... but it began to sink in that... they were using live fire."

Dr. Fintan Lane , from Ireland: "When they boarded our boat, we resisted entirely peacefully. I sat on the floor and tried to reason with them, but the Israeli commandos physically attacked us. Fiachra O Luain was dragged around the ground and I had a gun pointed in my face by a screaming commando. His mania was so intense that I genuinely feared for my life."

- **Sfendoni**: American Structural Engineer Gene St. Onge says, "I was kicked in the head... The captain was being pulled and hit. He sustained rather serious injuries... He had a punctured ear drum, a neck injury, and a back injury... I was thrown on the deck a couple times... a Libyan Arab living in Europe was hit with a butt end of a rifle in his right eye. He fell to the deck. He was writhing in pain, trying to get away, but he was continually being kicked. When I saw that, I tried to get to him. I was screaming, 'Leave him alone!' I kept getting pushed back. Finally I tried to cover him. At that point I was hit with a rifle or something. I was bleeding. And I was restrained with handcuffs."

- **Sophia** : Henning Mankell of Sweden recalls, "They were very aggressive... There was an older man in the crew, he was perhaps a little slow and they shot him in the arm with an electric gun which is very, very painful."

- **Mavi Marmara**: German parliamentarian Annette Groth described the experience as being "like war... They had guns, tasers, some type of teargas and other weaponry, compared to two-and-a-half wooden sticks we had between us."

On this ship, nine activists were shot to death.

Brazilian filmmaker Iara Lee says, "We expected them to shoot people in the legs, to shoot in the air, just to scare people, but they were direct.... It was unimaginable."

Sarah Colborne of the UK says, "The Israeli forces handcuffed members of the activist's medical team who were sent to help treat the injured. It was terrifying... If you talked they pointed a gun at you."

Hanin Zoabi, minister Israeli Knesset, says, "The Israeli navy fired on the ships five minutes before commandos descended from ropes that dangled from helicopters."

Jamal El-Shayyal, a journalist from Al Jazeera relates, "as this attack started I was on the top deck and within just a few minutes there were live shots being fired from above the ship where the helicopters were. The first shots that were fired were some sort of sound grenades. There was some teargas that was fired as well as rubber-coated steel bullets.... The live bullets came roughly about five minutes after that... There was definitely fire from the air because one of the people who was killed was clearly shot from above... the bullet targeted him at the top of his head. There was also fire coming from the sea as well. Most of the fire initially from the sea was teargas canisters and sound grenades. But then it became live fire. There is no doubt from what I saw that live ammunition was fired before any Israeli soldier was on deck."

### **Brutality Continues**

Hanin Zoabi and Sarah Colborne attempted to get medical help for the wounded but were ignored and forced to retreat. The wounded eventually bled to death.

The passengers of the "Free Gaza" flotilla say the violence and brutality did not end when the ships were seized. Upon arrest, all passengers were stripped of their personal belongings, including cell phones, laptops, and cameras. They were denied access to restroom facilities and some were beaten and brutalized.

American Huwaida Arraf tells of her experience in custody, "They forced me into a police van, literally, by pulling me up by my hair and my hands and feet and beating me in order to get me into the van. They drove me out of the port, stopped the car at some point-I'm not sure where because I was a little bit disoriented after being punched in the face and jaw, and then they just opened the door and threw me out of the van."

In light of the survivors' first-hand accounts, Israel's claim of "provoked" violence and "self-defense" is clearly a charade. Henning Mankell, the Swedish passenger on the *Sophia*, says plainly, "I think the Israeli military went out to commit murder.... If they had wanted to stop us they could have attacked our rudder or propeller, instead they preferred to send masked commando soldiers to attack us. This was Israel's choice to do this."

Israel jammed all telecommunications from flotilla members before and after the raid, bullying itself into the only position to explain its point of view—for the better part of a week. But it is increasingly clear that *all* the vessels were boarded violently. Survivors report live gunfire from Israeli gunboats and helicopters before boarding. Even though most passengers did not resist, Israel's commandos were violently abusive to peace activists on all the vessels. Such rough treatment occurred, according

to some survivors, practically up until they exited the country. Janet Coburn, an American Jewish retired math teacher, says, "We occasionally saw passengers beaten by the Israelis before they were put on the planes."

Dr. Fintan Lane reiterates, "Ken O'Keefe... suffered a severe beating at the hands of security officials at Tel Aviv airport before boarding, and his injuries were so bad that he had to be hospitalized in Tel Aviv."

Israel uses video taken of resistance to their commandos on the largest ship, the *Mavi Marmara*, to assert that the flotilla activists provoked violence. But it takes no imagination to believe the resisters, having heard and seen Israel violently subdue the other ships in the convoy, were intent on preventing it from doing the same. The Turkish activists were determined to avoid more violence on their larger ship with many passengers—a much more difficult ship for Israel to subdue. They obviously planned and took defensive action with such weapons as they could muster—sticks, rods, kitchen knives, etc. —even grabbing pistols from Israelis and shooting back.

It's significant that during the first week of this controversy, the world press, including Christian media, was choked with statements giving only Israel's point of view. Now that the survivors are able to speak, the largely Jewish and pro-Israel Christian big media, especially in America, seem unwilling to give them a forum—as if the world is not interested in their testimony.

The whole truth is now clear. Israel's attack was violent, cruel, and vindictive to nearly 700 idealists from 20 countries intent on a mission that was peaceful, humanitarian, and high-minded. Most activists responded passively, but were brutally treated nonetheless. Others, knowing full-well what was coming, responded in self-defense. Would you have reacted passively—or as the defenders of the *Mavi Marmara*?

Anyone with any moral conviction, courage, and loyalty to the safety of his fellow ship-mates is entitled to have done as those defenders. As far as I am concerned, the nine slain Turks are heroes.

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Rev. Ted Pike is director of the National Prayer Network, a Christian/conservative watchdog organization.

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