

# Solidarity in Israel with the Gaza Freedom Flotilla

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It was a strangely familiar feeling: waking up in the morning to the news of 10 people killed by the Israeli military forces. Within minutes, the Coalition of Women for Peace and several other organizations issued a call for a demonstration to meet the members of the Free Gaza Flotilla, who were brought in to the port of Ashdod, and to protest the siege of Gaza and the killing of peace activists.

Soon after the arrival of the first activists to the scene, just south of the port, we spotted two silhouettes in the calm waters of the Mediterranean: A small, white ship, one of the ships of the flotilla, and a dark missile boat circling it. As the boats approached, we unwrapped two big signs banners with our message of solidarity: "FREE GAZA".

Private vehicles began arriving and joining us on the beach. For the organized buses, which were bringing protesters from Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, reaching the site was more difficult. The bus from Tel-Aviv was stopped by the Israeli police and was allowed to pass only after our lawyer intervened and with a close escort by the police. The bus from Jerusalem was attacked by right-wing activists. Ultimately, everyone was able to gather at the beach, and more than 250 people stood with signs in support of the flotilla and in protest of the siege.

Thousands of protesters everywhere took the streets. Spontaneous protests took place in Haifa, Shefa-'Amr and other cities and towns. In the universities of Haifa, Tel-Aviv and Beer Sheva, students went out to protest. Mass demonstrations were organized later on Monday in Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, Um-El-Fahem and Haifa. I participated in the Tel-Aviv demonstration, where despite the short notice, more than a thousand people came to protest in front of the Ministry of Defense, demanding the release of the peace activists that were arrested and the immediate removal of the siege on Gaza. More demonstrations were organized on Tuesday in Jaffa and Haifa and the High Follow-Up Committee of the Arab citizens of Israel declared a general strike on that day.

The Israeli media repeated its familiar drill, highlighting a right-wing action of a dozen people with Israeli flags cheering to the army and dismissing thousands of local peace demonstrators. News flashes on "violent Arab riots" faithfully gave the Israeli public the impression that violent people simply decided to riot for no good reason, rather than Arabs and Jews acting upon their conscience and humanity.

The official version of the Israeli military and the government was embraced by the media with the usual readiness. Questioning "our" military is unpatriotic, as if questioning official versions is not the formal obligation of the media. In Israel, it simply doesn't work that way. Phone calls we received from all the major TV channels in Israel and the interviews we gave to all the major newspapers were mostly unpublished, silenced by either the reporters or the editors.

Despite this attempt to silence criticism, there are many Israeli citizens that object to this massacre and demand accountability from those responsible. The official version of the military and government has very little credibility, especially after imposing an electronic blockade on attempts

to document the raid. The international community has done so little to bring to trial those accountable for war crimes committed against the Palestinian people. Will other countries make more of an effort to intervene after crimes have been committed against their own citizens?

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\* <http://www.gaza-eng.coalitionofwomen.org/?p=220>