

# U.S. Boat to Gaza Seized by Greek Authorities and Captain Jailed

Passengers Determined to Free Captain and Set Sail Again

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After a two hour stand off at sea, the U.S. Boat to Gaza - The Audacity of Hope - was seized by the Greek Coast Guard and forced to return to the port of Piraeus under military escort. The boat's captain has been put in jail, charged with disturbing sea traffic-which includes endangering the lives of those on the ships- and disobeying a police order to remain at dock. The crew is being detained on the boat, which is being held at a military dock just outside Athens. Most of the 36 passengers remain on the ship in solidarity with the captain and crew.

Ann Wright, retired U.S. Army Colonel, responded strongly to the arrest of the American captain of the U.S. Boat to Gaza. "I think it's outrageous what the Greek government is doing to our captain who was taking a group of Americans to challenge the illegal Israeli blockade. We call on the Greek government to release our Captain and dismiss all charges."

Yonatan Shapira, a crew member on The Audacity of Hope and former Israeli Air Force captain, said the captain of the U.S. Boat should be praised, not condemned for his actions. "The captain acted out of concern for the safety of the passengers and boat by taking us away from the Greek port where other flotilla boats are being sabotaged," Shapira said.

After five days of stalling, the Greek authorities produced the results of the inspection of the boat, which took place on Monday, June 27. The Greek government inspected the boat on the basis of an anonymous complaint alleging that the boat is not seaworthy. The anonymous complaint later turned out to have been filed by the Israel Law Center. The list of infractions cited on the inspection report included such things as technical details regarding the construction material of the hull and the fact that the private inspection report emailed to the authorities was unsigned. "None of these alleged infractions are actually regulations that boats are required to meet," said group's Greek lawyer Emmanuel Stephanakis. "It's obvious that these are politically motivated, baseless charges calculated to stop the U.S. Boat to Gaza from sailing."

"This shameful chapter in Greek history is symbolized by Prime Minister Netanyahu thanking his Greek counterpart Prime Minister Papandreou for his cooperation in helping thwart the flotilla, and by the fully-armed and masked Greek commandos at sea, pointing their guns at unarmed American civilians singing "We are a gentle, loving people," says passenger Medea Benjamin.

The other boats in the flotilla that are docked in Greece have been denied permission to sail due to a variety of bureaucratic obstacles the Greek authorities have thrown in their way. Greece's Civil Protection Authority confirmed Saturday the ban on departures of ships "with Greek and foreign flags from Greek ports to the maritime area of Gaza" was in place until further notice. Two of the boats have had physical damage done to them as well. All vow to pressure the Greek government to grant them permission to sail, and have activated their international networks. In the United States, the phones at the Greek Embassy and Consulates were so busy that callers could not get through.

While deeply disappointed that they have not yet been able to sail to Gaza, the passengers feel they have been successful at exposing the ongoing plight of the people of Gaza and the inhumanity of the Israeli government. "The success of the flotilla is shown by the huge expenditure of financial and personnel resources by the Israeli government to counter 10 civilian, unarmed ships with 300 citizen activists who simply want to sail to Gaza out of concern for the people of Gaza," says jazz musician and passenger Richard Lopez.

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\* <http://ustogaza.org/latest/u-s-boat-to-gaza-seized-by-greek-authorities-and-captain-jailed/>