

# *Israel stops vessel from Gazan humanitarian flotilla*

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Tel Aviv, July 11 (RHC)-- The Israeli Navy was dispatched Tuesday to stop a boat which departed the Gaza Strip, and which was carrying injured Palestinian civilians. The boat intended to take the injured civilians from border protests to Cyprus for medical treatment.

The Navy stopped the boat, surrounding it and towing it to an Israeli naval base at Ashdod.

Organizers of the flotilla, which set off earlier on Tuesday, said contact with one boat was lost after 10 nautical miles. Israel's blockade restricts Gazan vessels to up to six nautical miles off the coastal territory.

On May 29, another flotilla, composed of a main boat accompanied by smaller boats, set sail from waters off Gaza, carrying Palestinian patients -- mostly those injured during the Tel Aviv regime's military crackdown on weeks-long rallies against Israel's occupation.

The flotilla was swiftly intercepted and seized by Israeli navy forces. The 17 Palestinian activists aboard the vessels were also taken into custody.

Separately, a "Freedom Flotilla Coalition" has dispatched a ship to Gaza, which similarly seeks to break the Israeli siege. It has traveled thousands of miles from Scandinavian ports and was reported to be near

Corsica on July 8.

Gaza has been under an Israeli siege since June 2007, which has caused a sharp decline in living standards as well as unprecedented unemployment and poverty. According to the UN, the stringent conditions threaten to render the territory uninhabitable by 2020.

The Israeli army has destroyed a lifeline tunnel crossing from the besieged Gaza Strip into the heart of the occupied territories.

Egypt closely cooperates with Israel in maintaining the siege by keeping Rafah, Gaza's only land terminal that bypasses Israel, closed most of the time. The situation has seriously affected the Palestinian patients' chances of seeking treatment abroad.

The Palestinian National Organizing Committee of the Great Return March has also confirmed the trip. The committee has been organizing the return rallies on the Gaza Strip's border since March 30th. At least 135 Palestinians, including 14 children, have been killed during the protests, which uphold Palestinians' right to return to their homes in the lands occupied by Israel.

On May 31st, 2010, Israeli commandos attacked one such flotilla, which was trying to take humanitarian aid to Gaza, in international waters in the Mediterranean, killing 10 activists onboard.

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