

Israeli forces arrest four Palestinian fishermen off Gaza coast, seize their boats



Ramallah, August 17 (RHC)-- Palestinian officials say Israeli naval forces have opened fire on several Palestinian fishing boats off the coast of the besieged Gaza Strip, and arrested four. Nizar Ayyash, the secretary of the Gaza fishermen's syndicate, said in a statement that Israeli forces targeted the Palestinian boats as they were fishing near the city of Beit Lahia, located about five kilometers north of Gaza City.

Ayyash added that Israeli marines then boarded two boats and arrested four fishermen, identified as Mohamed Ahmed Zayed and his son Tamer, along with Tawfiq al-Sultan and Rafat al-Sultan. Following the attack, Israeli forces confiscated the fishing boats and sailed them towards the Port of Ashdod, located about 40 kilometers south of Tel Aviv.

According to Gaza's fishermen union, roughly 50,000 Gazans make a living through fishing. The Palestinian Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) recently announced in a report that Israeli attacks against Palestinian fishermen in the Gaza Strip prevent "fishermen from practicing their fishing work and accessing their livelihood resources."

Israel imposed a limit of three nautical miles on fishing in the waters off the Gaza shore until August 2014, when Palestinian fishermen were allowed to go out six miles. Last month, however, Israel reduced the fishing area to only three nautical miles as part of punitive measures against Gazans over the launch of incendiary balloons from the Palestinian coastal sliver into the occupied territories as part of ongoing protests against the decades-long Israeli occupation.

Under the Oslo Accords, the fishing zone is supposed to extend to 20 nautical miles, but it has shrunk over the years as the Tel Aviv regime has imposed greater restrictions.

Over the past few years, Israeli forces have carried out more than a hundred attacks on Palestinian boats, arresting dozens of fishermen and confiscating several boats. The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli blockade since June 2007. The blockade has caused a decline in the standard of living as well as unprecedented levels of unemployment and unrelenting poverty.

According to Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, Israel's Gaza siege and "harassment of fishermen" have been "destroying Gaza's fishing sector," with 95 percent of fishermen living below the poverty line.

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