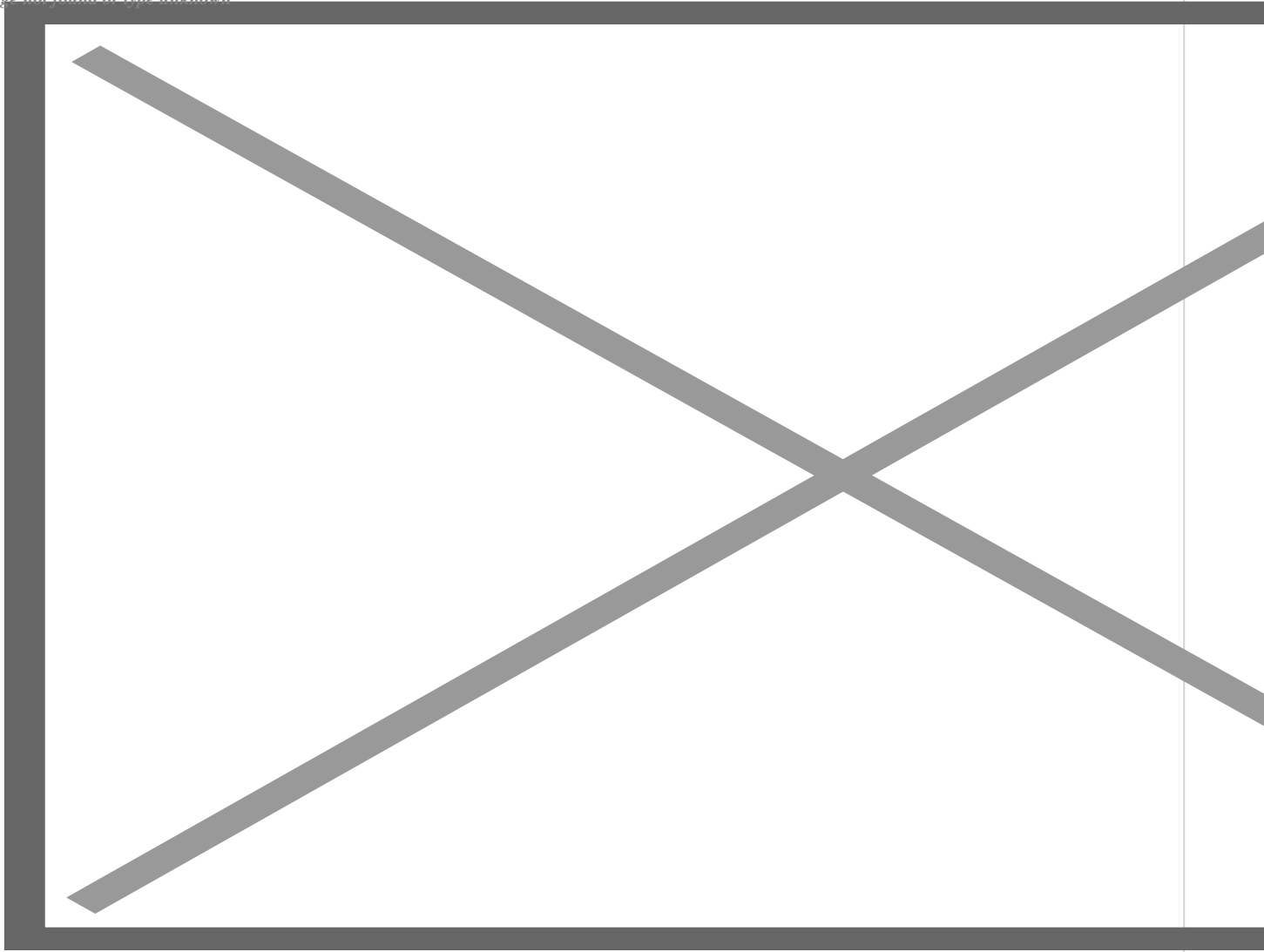


Aid ship sets sail from Cyprus to Gaza amid Israeli naval blockade

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The Spanish charity Open Arms ship is carrying food provided by World Central Kitchen in a bid to break the blockade on Gaza. (Photo via WCK)

Gaza City, March 12 (RHC)-- The charity ship Open Arms has left a port in Cyprus towing relief supplies bound for Gaza as part of an international effort to launch a maritime corridor to break the naval Israeli

blockade amid the US-backed Israeli war on the territory.

The ship was seen sailing out of Larnaca port in Cyprus early on Tuesday, towing a barge containing about 200 tonnes of flour, rice, and protein in a pilot project to open a fresh maritime pathway delivering aid to a population teetering on the edge of famine.

The EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, praised Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides for his "leadership in setting up the humanitarian maritime corridor to Gaza." The EU chief wrote on X that "the departure of the first ship is a sign of hope. We will work together for many more ships to follow. We will do everything in our power for aid to reach Palestinians."

The Open Arms, a salvage vessel owned by a Spanish NGO and more accustomed to rescuing migrants at sea, is towing a barge with hundreds of tonnes of food sourced by the charity World Central Kitchen (WCK).

Israel has been preventing humanitarian aid from reaching Gaza's 2.3 million population.

Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) Cindy McCain said on Monday that famine is imminent in northern Gaza if the size of aid entering the enclave does not increase "exponentially."

"Right now, WFP is gravely concerned about humanitarian conditions across Gaza, particularly the north which is in the grip of a humanitarian catastrophe," McCain said at a news conference in Rome for the launch of the initiative "Food for Gaza."

The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen said on Tuesday that, "The situation on the ground is more dramatic than ever, and it has reached a tipping point. We have all seen the reports of children dying of starvation. This cannot be." She revealed that the bloc had put into effect the EU civil protection mechanism to enhance its ability to deliver humanitarian aid.

The Open Arms aid ship is set to dock in Gaza at the same time that a U.S. army vessel is reacting the war-ravaged territory's shores. The U.S. has announced its plans to construct a temporary facility to purportedly deliver humanitarian supplies.

The U.S. project comes as Washington has provided billions of dollars in aid as well as weapons that Israel has used in Gaza since October 7th. A spokesperson for WCK said they were building a jetty unrelated to the US project.

"WCK and partners agree more than one ship will be needed and are working towards a constant flow of aid," WCK said in a statement, adding that another 500 tones of aid were ready to follow the initial shipment.

Israel launched the war on the Gaza Strip on October 7 after Palestinian resistance groups carried out a retaliatory operation into the occupied territories.

Concomitantly with the war, the regime has been enforcing a near-total siege on Gaza, which has reduced the flow of foodstuffs, medicine, electricity, and water into the Palestinian territory into a trickle.

Since the onset of the military onslaught, the regime has killed more than 31,112 Gazans, most of them women and children. The aggression has also destroyed the infrastructure of the besieged Gaza, damaged vital facilities or forcing them to shut down.



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