



# Women's Flotilla a 'carefully scripted publicity stunt'

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies requested space to air its views on the Women's Boat to Gaza. Here, we give **David Saks** that opportunity

**N**OW THAT the latest Gaza Flotilla tour de farce has run its course, the organisers might well think of offering their services to Donald Trump to help salvage his faltering election campaign. Certainly, one would be hard-put to find a better example of illusion triumphing over substance, of emotionally manipulative puffery trumping (pun intended) basic facts, law and logic.

According to the script – and from start to finish, the Women's Flotilla was never more than a carefully scripted and choreographed publicity stunt – this was a case of brave and principled human rights activists showing solidarity with a besieged, helpless population unjustly subjected by its brutal neighbour to a blockade that is both cruel and illegal.

That this meticulous fabrication rapidly falls apart when subjected to even a cursory investigation has not, unfortunately, prevented at least some media outlets from uncritically endorsing it.

There are many who automatically go into intellectual shut-down mode whenever the State of Israel presumes to speak in its own defence.

In this case, fortunately, one need go no further than the findings of a UN commission to expose the falsity of the above claims. First and foremost, Israeli naval restrictions over Gaza are entirely legal.

THE INTERNATIONAL Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC) is a grass-roots people-to-people solidarity movement composed of campaigns and initiatives from all over the world working together to end the siege of Gaza.

The Freedom Flotilla Coalition was formed after the 2010 Freedom Flotilla mission, in order to co-ordinate action between numerous local campaigns that joined the efforts against

## WHAT IS THE FREEDOM FLOTILLA?

the siege of the Gaza Strip.

In 2010, the Turkish ship the Mavi Marmara, which was part of the flotilla, was attacked by the Israeli naval forces and resulted in the deaths of 10 Turkish activists. At the end of September, Israel paid \$20 million in

compensation to Ankara in a deal struck in August.

The FFC respects the human rights of everyone, regardless of race, gender, tribe, religion, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, citizenship or language.

Our actions against the blockade are always governed by the principles of non-violence and non-violent resistance.

We stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people, but support no particular political party or organisation, without exception. – Freedom Flotilla Coalition, with additional reporting by Janet Smith

● Read more at [www.freedomflotilla.org](http://www.freedomflotilla.org)

In 2011, a Panel of Inquiry commissioned by secretary-general Ban Ki-moon concluded them to be “a legitimate security measure in order to prevent weapons from entering Gaza by sea and its implementation complied with the requirements of international law”.

The commission further recognised that Israel faced “a real threat to its security from militant groups in Gaza”, and that in view of persistent efforts by Hamas to smuggle in weaponry it is fully justified in inspecting all goods and material marked for Gaza prior to their transfer. (As it happened, the very day the flotilla was approaching the Gaza coast, a rocket was fired into the Israeli border town of Sderot, which has endured a continual bombardment from Gaza since Israel withdrew from the territory more than 10

years ago.)

Tellingly, one of the key recommendations of the UN Report was that “all humanitarian missions wishing to assist the Gaza population should do so through established procedures and the designated land crossings in consultation with the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority”.

It was this directive, one neither unreasonable nor particularly burdensome, that the Women's Flotilla, as was the case with all previous flotilla initiatives, set out to flout.

Far from being a humanitarian peace mission this was, in the words of one of the boat's captains, first and foremost a “provocation”, one aimed at flouting international law with the aim of strengthening the hand of Hamas and other violent

extremists in the Middle East.

That no essential supplies were taken along is hardly surprising, since undermining the legitimacy of Israel's right to self-defence rather than alleviating hardship among the Gaza population was what the venture was really aimed at.

Emotive rhetoric to the effect that Palestinians are “besieged” or “starving” is belied by the fact that on a daily basis, some 800 to 1000 trucks enter Gaza to bring food, medicine and other such humanitarian and civilian goods.

Palestinians also regularly enter Israel to receive medical assistance (despite previous incidents where supposed patients have attempted to or actually carried out terrorist attacks).

It is further a little reported-on reality that a vast amount of international aid

to Gaza is being siphoned off by Hamas for purposes of stockpiling weapons and building cross-border tunnels aimed at smuggling fighters into Israel and carrying out further terrorist attacks, as has been done in the past.

As for the “Gaza is under siege” canard the reality, as is so frequently the case when it comes to anti-Israel rhetoric, is precisely the opposite. A siege, by definition, aims at forcing one's way in against the will of the besieged population. By comparison, Israel very obviously seeks not at seizing control of Gaza (which could do very easily) but to keeping violent enemies out. And if Gaza is indeed “the world's largest open-air prison”, as is routinely claimed, then its people – or at least their elected leaders – are their own jailers.

Nothing has changed since the UN Commission presented its report. Gaza remains under the dictatorial control of Hamas, a radical Islamist grouping that in word and deed has made no secret of its desire to pursue Israel's violent destruction, regardless of the cost even to its own subject population.

It is, as always, in the hands of Gazans themselves to end the blockade – all they have to do is abandon their self-destructive and clearly unattainable goal of destroying Israel and undertake to live in peace with their neighbours (which includes Egypt, by the way, which also enforces a blockade against Gaza, although this is routinely overlooked).

Had the organisers and supporters of the Women's Flotilla really cared about the welfare of the beleaguered Gaza population, this is exactly what they should be urging their leaders to do. Instead, they expend their supposed moral outrage against Israel for maintaining a blockade rather than against the persistent violence and terrorism that makes such measures necessary.

This is perhaps the most abhorrent aspect of the fraud that they and their supporters around the world are perpetrating.

David Saks is associate director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies