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BOFAXE



Gaza Flotilla Gives Humanitarianism a Bad Name

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Fokus

The Palmer report endorses the findings of the UNHRC's international fact-finding mission's report with respect to the responsibilities and objectives of the Gaza Flotilla organisers.

Political provocations do not warrant excessive and lethal use of force, but they should not be organised under the label of humanitarian aid.

UNGA Doc. A/HRC/1521 & Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident (September 2011).

The Gaza Flotilla actions of May 31st 2010 constituted a rather controversial activity from a traditional humanitarian point of view. The consortium of six non-governmental organisations that sailed for Gaza was given the code name "Palestine Our Route, Humanitarian Aid Our Load", which conveyed a notion of humanitarianism to the action.

The Israeli interception, in particular the excessive use of force, triggered the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Secretary-General to initiate two separate investigations. Both reports are equally critical with respect to the objectives and behavior of the Gaza Flotilla organisers and activists. According to the Free Gaza Movement mission statement, the organisers wanted to "(...) break the siege of Gaza. We have not and will not ask for Israel's permission."

The first report by the United Nations Human Rights Committee's fact-finding mission concluded, that "it seems clear that the primary objective [of the Flotilla] was political" and that there was a tension between that objective and "its humanitarian objective" (page 19). The second report, which is named after its Chairperson Geoffrey Palmer, was initiated by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, is even more critical. With respect to the facts, it concludes, that "there exist serious questions about the conduct, true nature and objectives of the flotilla organizers, particularly IHH [the Turkish NGO *Humanitarian Relief Foundation*]. The actions of the flotilla needlessly carried the potential for escalation" (page 48). The Palmer report is very clear in its recommendations with respect to humanitarian missions: "Humanitarian missions must act in accordance with the principles of neutrality, impartiality and humanity and respect any security measures in place. Humanitarian vessels should allow inspection and stop or change course when requested" (page 6).

There can be no doubt that the Gaza Flotilla's main objective was raising public awareness by running the Gaza blockade. To the extent that political action has provoked Israel, it cannot warrant any excessive and lethal use of force what so ever. However, by masquerading political action as humanitarian one, the Gaza Flotilla organisers have not done the humanitarian cause a big favour, because it has compromised and jeopardised the independent and neutral nature of humanitarianism. Especially in highly sensitive political situations, the rational principles of humanitarianism should be upheld and respected in its most rigorous interpretation.

Especially, considering today's threats to humanitarian aid workers in the field, extreme caution should be taken when combining different "humanitarian" objectives. The establishment of a World Humanitarian Day by the UN in 2008 signals the need to respect humanitarian relief work. The Gaza Flotilla organisers neglected that need and by (mis)using the flag of humanitarian aid and disrespecting humanitarian principles for their own political objectives, they bear moral co-responsibility for the death of their fellow activists on board of the *Mavi Marmara*.

Verantwortung

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