

**Security Council**

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Identical letters dated 21 June 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I write in regards to an issue that could affect peace and security in our region.

It has come to my Government's attention that a group of non-governmental organizations is moving forward with plans to challenge Israel's naval blockade of the Gaza Strip with a flotilla of some 5 to 10 ships. Reports indicate that the ships participating in this initiative will set sail from several ports in Europe and elsewhere, arriving in the vicinity of the Gaza Strip around 25 or 26 June.

Many groups participating in this flotilla, such as the European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza, the Free Gaza Movement, and the International Solidarity Movement, maintain ties with extremist and terrorist organizations, including Hamas. Some flotilla organizers have made comments to the media indicating their plans to employ a range of tactics to resist the enforcement of the naval blockade by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). These tactics, which might include physical confrontation with the IDF, could spark unnecessary violence resulting in harm to persons and property.

Launched under false pretext of providing humanitarian assistance, this provocation is clearly designed only to serve an extremist political agenda and holds the potential for dangerous consequences. There is no need for this flotilla. As is widely known, there are established mechanisms by which humanitarian assistance can be delivered to the Gaza Strip, including through Israel.

The United Nations and other international actors use such mechanisms on a daily basis to transfer various goods to Gaza, which has helped to spur economic growth of 16 per cent in the area over the course of 2010. We continue to witness progress in the implementation of internationally funded humanitarian projects in Gaza, overseen by organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and others. As of the beginning of March 2011, Israel had approved 121 such projects in Gaza. Only this week, Israel approved 18 additional UNRWA schools and new United Nations housing projects in Khan Yunis and Rafah.



Many international leaders, including heads of State, United Nations representatives, and a majority of Security Council members, have spoken out clearly against these kinds of flotillas to Gaza over the past year, emphasizing the need for humanitarian supplies to be transferred to the area only through established channels.

In a statement on 3 March 2011, H.E. Mr. David Cameron, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, said, "Israel is within its rights to search vessels bringing cargo into Gaza."

Just last month, in a statement on 27 May 2011, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed his belief that "assistance and goods destined to Gaza should be channeled through legitimate crossings and established channels", making clear that flotillas "carry the potential to escalate into violent conflict". The Secretary-General reaffirmed this point in more than 20 recent letters to Member States with Mediterranean ports, encouraging these countries to act to prevent further flotillas from being launched.

Israel has repeatedly made clear that the maritime area west of the Gaza Strip is considered an area of hostilities, and a naval blockade, which Israel officially declared on 3 January 2009, remains in effect in that zone. Accordingly, all vessels, including civilian vessels, are strictly prohibited from entering the blockaded area.

This blockade is intended to prevent the smuggling of arms into Gaza. The persistence of this illegal activity has been illustrated by the continued discovery of weapons bound for Gaza by land and sea. One such incident occurred last March when three concealed containers of arms, munitions, and military equipment were captured on board the *Victoria* cargo vessel.

Israel calls on all nations to do all in their power to prevent the above-mentioned flotilla from occurring and to effectively caution their citizens about the risks associated with participating in such harmful provocations.

These kinds of actions are particularly troubling in the light of the present turmoil in the Middle East. The international community must send an unambiguous message to the organizers of these provocations that such initiatives only serve to raise tensions in our region, stressing that the appropriate means for transferring humanitarian goods to Gaza is through established channels. Let me stress that Israel is not interested in confrontation, but is firmly determined to enforce the naval blockade of the Gaza Strip.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter distributed as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ron **Prosor**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative