

Activists on boats to challenge Israeli blockade

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy | Nov. 3, 2011 NCR Today

Two civilian boats carrying 27 people are currently in international waters making their way to the beleaguered Gaza Strip in an attempt to challenge Israel's ongoing blockade of the Palestinian territory.

Passengers aboard the Canadian *Tahrir* (Liberation), and the Irish *Saoirse* (Freedom) say the message they carry is one of unity, defiance and hope in spite of Israel's policies that have separated Palestinians from each other.

Organizers of the initiative, known as "Freedom Waves to Gaza," say they chose not to publicize the boats' departures in advance because of Israeli efforts to block and sabotage a flotilla that attempted to depart for Gaza from Athens, Greece, last July.

The two boats, which set sail from Fethiye, Turkey, on Wednesday, are expected to arrive in Gaza on Friday afternoon, sailing from international waters straight into Gaza's territorial waters. The vessels are carrying a symbolic amount of humanitarian aid -- \$30,000 in medicines -- along with a diverse group of passengers, all committed to nonviolent defense of the flotilla and Palestinian human rights.

This voyage marks the 11th time international activists have tried to break the siege of Gaza via the sea. Five missions arrived safely in Gaza between August and December 2008; the remaining efforts were intercepted by Israel. On May 2010, Israeli troops stormed the *Marvi Marmara*, the largest ship of a Turkish-based flotilla, killing nine civilians, including a U.S. citizen. The widely condemned Israeli raid led to protests around the world. Efforts to bring a second flotilla to Gaza were foiled by the government of Greece last July following pressure by Israel and Western governments. Activists say "acts of Israeli sabotage" also prevented the flotilla's departure.

Passengers aboard the *Tahrir* include a Canadian academic, a Palestinian philosophy student and American Kit Kittredge, a 53-year-old grandmother and member of the women's peace group [Code Pink](#) [1]. Embedded with the passengers is Jihan Hafiz, a correspondent for *Democracy Now*. The daily radio/TV news program [has been carrying live coverage of the boats' journey](#) [2].

Several Irish parliamentarians are traveling on the *Saoirse*. The [website for the Irish boat](#) [3] reports that Pdraig Mac Lochlainn, spokesperson on foreign affairs for the Irish political party Sinn Fein, praised the "heroism and courage of the crew of the *MV Saoirse*" when he learned of the ship's successful entry into international waters.

Mac Lochlainn called on the Irish government to speak to the Israeli government and seek safe passage for the *MV Saoirse*, and to do all in its power to end the siege of Gaza and the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Earlier this year, the propeller shaft of the *MV Saoirse* was sabotaged while docked in Turkey, which prevented the ship from completing its aid mission as part of the second freedom flotilla. The Irish ship has since been repaired with funds raised via small donations from Irish citizens.

Video of the journey:

Follow the [Tahrir](#) [4] and the [Saoirse](#) [5]. The main voyage can be tracked [here](#) [6].

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Links:

[1] <http://www.codepink.org/>

[2] http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/2/exclusive_gaza_bound_freedom_waves_flotilla

[3] http://irishshiptogaza.org/?page_id=494

[4] <http://www.tahrir.ca/>

[5] <http://irishshiptogaza.org/>

[6] <http://ustogaza.org/>