



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEMOCRATIC LAWYERS

CHAUSÉE DE HAECHT 55, 1210, BRUXELLES-BRUSSELS, BELGIQUE-BELGIUM

info@iadllaw.org www.iadllaw.org

IADL condemns Israel's attack on the "Handala" and calls for immediate end to the genocide and starvation in Gaza

The International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL) condemns the Israeli occupation's naval attack on the "Handala" ship of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. The UK-flagged ship, carrying 21 passengers (19 human rights defenders and two international journalists), was hijacked and seized in international waters. All 21 passengers announced that they would launch an open-ended hunger strike should their boat be attacked; many are currently being unlawfully detained by Israel.

Several of the detainees have been deported or released, while others remain detained, including Chris Smalls, founder of the Amazon Workers' Union, who was also severely beaten. We call for the immediate release of all detainees taken from the "Handala," the boat and its supplies, as well as the immediate provision of food and humanitarian aid through legitimate international mechanisms to the Palestinian people of Gaza. To that end, we call for the immediate end of the unlawful blockade of Gaza, the opening of land crossings to enter the thousands of tons of aid awaiting delivery, and an immediate ceasefire by Israel. We further emphasize the responsibility of all third states under the Genocide Convention to bring an end to the ongoing Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people.

The mission of the "Handala" and the Gaza Freedom Flotilla is to break the unlawful siege and blockade of the Gaza Strip imposed by Israel, the occupying power. As a civilian initiative expressing the solidarity of global civil society with Gaza and the Palestinian people against imposed starvation, siege and genocide, the Gaza Freedom Flotilla aims to fulfill international duties, morally and under international law.

The "Handala's" voyage aimed not only to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza, [including baby formula](#), which has been repeatedly denied entry by the Israeli occupation army carrying out a genocide against the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza, but to bring an end to the ongoing deadly blockade, part and parcel of the Israeli genocide. The unlawful blockade is currently the cause of a human-engineered famine and starvation in Gaza, which has already taken the lives of 65 Palestinians due to malnutrition alone in July 2025.

Initiatives like the "Handala" have been forced to take sail in light of the failure of third states and international institutions to take necessary actions to bring the Israeli genocide, blockade, and deliberate starvation policy to an end. Indeed, the "Handala's" mission was launched as part and parcel of a grassroots effort to enforce the binding preliminary orders of the International Court of Justice (January, March and May 2024) to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza.

The IADL expresses its solidarity with the civilian passengers and crew of the "Handala," from Australia, France, Italy, Tunisia, Morocco, Spain, Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States. We highlight the statements of Huwaida Arraf, a civil rights lawyer in the United States and a member of the National Lawyers Guild, IADL's member organization in the United



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States. She is a co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement and Free Gaza Movement, and a global leader in the movement for human rights for Palestinians. As the Handala sailed closer to Gaza's shore the Israeli Army contacted the crew communicating lies about their mission, Huwaida Arraf's strong response was:

“Let me give you a lesson in international human rights law.

"Any blockade that deliberately starves a civilian population is a violation of international law. It is not only that – it is a war crime. You have no legal authority to enforce an unlawful blockade. And as such, you have no authority to use force to enforce an unlawful blockade.

“Therefore, we demand that you stand down. You are responsible for the wellbeing of every civilian on board this vessel. As an occupying power in Gaza, you are responsible for the health and wellbeing of the civilian population there.

“Not only have you disregarded that obligation, but you are actively exterminating the people. You have engineered a famine. You are deliberately starving civilians and children before the eyes of the world.

“Our vessel does not constitute any threat to you. We carry only humanitarian aid, and therefore, you have no authority to intercept or otherwise attack our vessel. We demand again that you stand down.”

This is not the first violent attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. After the successful entry of five ships to Gaza in 2008, Israel has repeatedly prevented boats from sailing or unlawfully intercepted them at sea in international water. In 2010, Israeli occupation forces attacked the “Mavi Marmara,” a Turkish ship leading a multi-vessel flotilla to Gaza, killing 10 human rights defenders on board. In just the past three months, as Israel has escalated the human-engineered starvation and famine in Gaza through escalation of the blockade and denial of humanitarian aid, it has also attacked the Freedom Flotilla and its vessels three times.

In May 2025, the Gaza Freedom Flotilla's ship “Conscience” was evidently bombed by Israeli drones near Malta, injuring crew and damaging relief cargo. In June, the “Madleen” flotilla ship was similarly unlawfully boarded, taken over by occupation soldiers, and seized in international waters, and its international participants unlawfully detained by the Israeli occupation. Now, in a repeat of the June attack – even as the imposed starvation in Gaza has considerably worsened, with 67 Palestinians killed by malnutrition in July 2025 alone – the Israeli occupation forces once again hijacked the “Handala” in international waters in order to enforce its illegal blockade on Gaza.

The attack on the “Handala” violates not only the outstanding orders of the International Court of Justice in *South Africa v. Israel*, which mandate the entry of humanitarian aid, but also Article 92 of UNCLOS, which requires exclusive jurisdiction over ships at sea to be held by the flagging country; Articles 23 and 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which forbid collective punishment,



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such as the blockade, and require free passage for humanitarian needs; and peremptory norms of international law.

Further, this attack comes in a clear effort to further Israel’s use of food and medicine as a weapon of war and to continue the imposed starvation of Palestinians in Gaza. This comes alongside the systematic denial of entry of aid to Palestinians, as well as the creation of the so-called “Gaza Humanitarian Foundation,” a joint U.S.-Israeli project. The GHF, which has been repudiated by the United Nations and the international aid community, has created “death traps” throughout the Gaza Strip at which nearly 1,000 Palestinians have been killed. U.S. mercenaries employed at these sites, as well as the Israeli occupation army, have repeatedly used live fire against aid-seeking Palestinians. The GHF does not aim to provide aid to starving civilians and does not meet Israel’s obligations under international humanitarian law. Rather, it aims to further the violations of such law by facilitating the displacement and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza.

At the same time, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the World Food Program (WFP), and other legitimate aid distribution mechanisms are being blocked from receiving or distributing aid due to the Israeli blockade.

Amid 22 months of escalated genocide, we emphasize that the United States, Britain, European Union countries and Canada are not merely failing to live up to their obligations under international law, but are active participants in the genocide against the Palestinian people through their supply of weapons, intelligence support, and economic and diplomatic coercive measures in support of Israel.

We call upon all states to, among other measures:

- Demand the immediate release of the “Handala” passengers and the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza;
- Impose a full two-way arms embargo on Israel;
- Close Israeli embassies, expel Israeli ambassadors and withdraw ambassadors from Israel;
- Open prosecutions of Israeli officials and soldiers and complicit third-state officials for their ongoing perpetuation of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza;
- Immediately carry out all forms of pressure to open the land crossings to enter thousands of trucks waiting for access to Gaza.

We further call upon third states to sponsor ships and humanitarian flotillas to the Gaza Strip to bring an end to the unlawful Israeli blockade. Palestinians in Gaza, even as people under occupation, have the right to receive boats carrying humanitarian aid in their territorial waters.

We urge national bar associations, lawyers, and legal practitioners worldwide to initiate amicus briefs, domestic civil actions, and referrals to UN and ICC mechanisms to hold Israel—and any complicit states—responsible for their violations. We further encourage the use of domestic law and universal jurisdiction to hold accountable Israeli and third-state corporations and individuals, including soldiers, mercenaries and military contractors, involved in the genocide, pursue the



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prosecution of “charities” and nonprofit organizations that provide direct aid to the Israeli military and settlement enterprise, and urge the international legal community defend activists and human rights defenders criminalized or prosecuted for their opposition to genocide.

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