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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jerusalem Center for Women

Israel kills aid workers in international waters

Israel launches a night raid on the Freedom Flotilla, killing up to 20 human rights activists

The Jerusalem Center for Women expresses sadness at the unprovoked Israeli attack on the international humanitarian aid convoy traveling to deliver much needed humanitarian supplies, such as building material and food to the 1.5 million people who have been living under three years of Israeli blockade. In addition to basic humanitarian items, the ships were also carrying medical supplies and generators bound for one of Gaza's largest hospitals. JCW condemns Israel's assault in the strongest terms.

On the early morning of May 31st Israeli forces attacked the 'Freedom Flotilla', the 6 boats organized by the Freedom for Gaza movement. Up to 20 unarmed civilians traveling on board the boats were killed when Israeli Commandos opened live fire, at least 30 other humanitarian activists on the boat were also injured. More than two days after the massacre, the exact numbers and the identity of the dead and injured is still unclear, as Israel has imposed an information blackout on the event. 629 humanitarian activists who were aboard the ship are currently being detained. Most families of the detained have said they have neither been allowed to speak to their loved ones nor been given information on their well being.

Three more ships, in the aid convoy, which had been held back by technical problems, will be attempting to deliver aid to Gaza this Wednesday, June 2nd. Israel has already warned these boats will also be intercepted.

The ships were carrying around 10,000 tons of aid to the besieged Palestinians of Gaza, as well as over 600 international activists from more than 30 countries. Activists on board included authors, film-makers, politicians and journalists from Europe, the Middle East, Pakistan, the US and Canada. Among them a Nobel Peace Prize winner, a former UN Assistant Secretary-General and European members of parliament.

Civil society decided to act in the face of the shameful silence of the international community towards Israel's blockade of Gaza since 2006. Israel allows only a restricted list of items to go through the crossings, which it fully controls. The United Nations estimate that Israel allows into

Gaza only a quarter of what residents actually need. Israel denies Palestinians of Gaza their freedom of movement, as only a few receive Israeli permits to travel in or out of the Strip, even in cases of medical emergencies. Human rights activists have been trying since 2008 to reach Gaza by sea, traveling through international waters and Gaza waters, in full compliance with international law and in the spirit of human solidarity. 5 times out of 9 they were successful.

While Israel is solely responsible for these senseless deaths, yesterday's massacre is a result both of Israel's illegal and immoral policy towards Gaza, and of the international community's acquiescence to it. Now is the time for the international community to shoulder its responsibility, hold Israel accountable for its flagrant violations of international law and call for an immediate end to the blockade in Gaza, which applies collective punishment to of 1.5 million people, half of whom are women, and close to 60 percent of whom are under the age of 18.

The Jerusalem Center for Women joins the numerous voices, both local and international, in offering deep condolences to the families of the dead. JCW also joins in calling for an end to Israel's information blackout on the events of May 31st and the subsequent detention of the international activists.

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