



### [Israel's Kidnapping of Activists Aboard the International Aid Boat Bound for Gaza](#)

Israel has drawn criticism for its illegal seizure of the *Madleen*, a Gaza-bound international aid boat seeking to deliver humanitarian supplies, which saw Israeli forces abduct and detain all of the activists onboard. The ship was intercepted outside of any country's territorial waters in the middle of the night, adding to the outrage over the unlawful move. The dozen civilian passengers traveling on the boat included climate activist Greta Thunberg and European Parliament member Rima Hassan. As various officials and organizations were quick to point out, Israel had no legal authority to stop, let alone arbitrarily kidnap and apprehend those on the boat since the crew members were meant to be considered protected civilian activists on a humanitarian mission. Furthermore, Israel elicited rebuke for seeking to charge the activists with "illegal entry" despite the fact that they were forcibly brought to Israel against their will after being abducted in international waters and then held in isolation at a detention facility unless they agreed to leave immediately. Of the entire group of 12 passengers on the vessel who were illegally detained and taken into custody, ten – including Thunberg – have been deported while the two remaining activists are expected to be deported today.

Back in early June, the group of global activists hailing from the seven countries of Sweden, France, Brazil, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Turkey set sail on the boat from Italy with the aim of breaking Israel's unlawful blockade on Gaza and delivering much-needed food and medical supplies to the territory's besieged civilians. Israel's actions against the *Madleen* are yet another demonstration of how far it is willing to go in order to try and silence increasing solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. It is merely one of the latest examples of Israel brazenly and blatantly violating norms of international law. Respected groups such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, and others have long documented Israel's use of starvation as a weapon of war, and it is evidence of this and the calamitous consequences that have prompted attempted actions like that of the *Madleen* and its crew. The already dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza have worsened even further since early March when Israel imposed a total siege, preventing any aid from entering for over 11 weeks. Since mid-May, the highly inadequate and widely criticized Israeli aid takeover has been disastrous, with repeated instances of civilians being killed by Israeli forces indiscriminately opening fire on crowds gathered at the distribution sites.

While in custody, human rights groups documented how the activists were subjected to abuse and mistreatment at the hands of Israeli authorities. Even during the illegal seizure of the boat itself, Israeli drones had dropped a mysterious white chemical irritant that caused burning eyes and obstructed vision. One of the French members of the boat's crew recounted acts of ill-treatment while the group was unlawfully detained including threats of physical violence, the denial of access to toilets, sleep deprivation, mockery, and the blocking of efforts to speak with lawyers and family members. Still, despite the dehumanizing circumstances that they faced, many of the activists have maintained that the public should focus less on what they endured and more on the continued war crimes and human rights abuses in Gaza. As one remarked, the kidnapping of the activists pales in comparison to what civilians in Gaza have been enduring for the past 20 months.

Regrettably, the illegal seizure of the *Madleen* and the abduction of its passengers does not come as a surprise to those that have been closely following Israel's actions in Gaza and the scope of its violations of international law. It also marks the second time now in recent months that an aid boat bound for Gaza has been hindered or attacked

while in international waters – following the early May incident involving the *Conscience* whereby the vessel was hit by drones attributed to Israel off the coast of Malta, forcing the mission to be abandoned. As the *Madleen* sailed towards Gaza, the activists on board had even repeatedly warned and suspected a potential Israeli assault of the boat. Thus, while hope was always slim that the humanitarian aid boat would actually reach Gaza, the latest occurrence with the *Madleen* helps to at least shed further light on the increasingly commonplace Israeli breaches of international law and human rights abuses.