



Gaza Freedom Flotilla and Israel's Repeated Violations of International Law

Repeated attacks against Gaza-bound humanitarian aid boats and seizures of them have drawn widespread and justifiable criticism from rights groups, government officials, and global bodies such as the United Nations. This diverse array of entities has sought to highlight how this behavior constitutes a flagrant violation of international law. Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), freedom of navigation must be upheld, and the peaceful passage of vessels should not be impeded. Despite this, humanitarian aid boats, including most recently the Global Sumud Flotilla, have been regularly subjected to drone attacks and other acts of sabotage attributed to Israel. The latest even prompted a host of countries like Spain, Italy, and Turkey to condemn these unlawful actions and dispatch naval assets in order to protect and monitor the aforementioned flotilla on its route.

There is a clearly documented pattern of Israeli forces illegally attacking and seizing humanitarian aid flotillas that are attempting to break the blockade of Gaza. The recent attacks on the Global Sumud Flotilla are far from an isolated incident. Just this year alone in 2025, several other activist vessels have been similarly targeted over the preceding months. Back in May, “The Conscience” was hit by two armed drones in international waters off of the coast of Malta; and in June, the crew of activists aboard “The Madleen” were forcefully detained and deported, as were those traveling on “The Handala” the following month in July. On top of the fact that these instances continue to take place without proper deterrent and punitive measures being enacted to prevent future occurrences, the brazen nature of them is also deeply alarming. In all of these cases, Israeli forces have committed these unlawful actions against peaceful humanitarian aid flotillas while these boats were in international waters or in port.

Under international law, those seeking to deliver humanitarian aid are meant to be explicitly protected. The Geneva Conventions stipulate this for medics, journalists, aid workers, and other civilians, while also establishing the right of populations in need to receive humanitarian relief. Thus, any attack or obstruction of a peaceful aid convoy is deemed to be a grave breach of international law. Furthermore, Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) defines intentionally directing attacks against “installations, material, units, or vehicles” involved in a humanitarian assistance mission as a war crime. It also criminalizes both the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and the willful obstruction of humanitarian aid – two things that Israel has been consistently found to be doing in Gaza by impartial experts and observers. Ultimately, as a result of all of these factors and the Gaza Freedom Flotilla’s efforts to counter unlawful behavior, there is no denying that its boats warrant protection – particularly when there are multiple binding instruments of international law which are intended to guarantee their right to deliver humanitarian aid.

The Global Sumud Flotilla set sail back in late August and is made up of around 50 vessels with human rights activists, journalists, and artists from more than 44 different countries. On Wednesday, as had been anticipated, Israeli forces yet again violated international law by seizing the flotilla and detaining the activists on board its civilian boats who were seeking to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza. A statement by the flotilla recounted how Israeli naval vessels intentionally damaged ship communications in an attempt to block distress signals and stop the livestream of their illegal boat boarding prior to doing so. As the numerous voices who condemned the move were quick to draw attention to, the seizure of boats in international waters was contrary to international law and

violated the sovereignty of all the nations that took part in the flotilla. As such, unsurprisingly, Israel's actions have garnered widespread denunciation and sparked protests in countries around the world.