

Mahathir: Rachel Corrie ship to proceed to Gaza
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The Rachel Corrie ship, which is attempting to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza with six Malaysians on board, will go ahead with its plan despite yesterday's attack by the Israeli navy on a Turkish ship on a similar mission.

Perdana Global Peace Organisation (PGPO) chairperson Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the ship was going to sail through Gaza waters and it had nothing to do with Israel.

"They are not going to Israeli waters. Why is it that these Israelis are going to block people going towards Gaza and not using Israeli's territorial waters at all? They have no right," he said.

In fact, he said, two more ships were going and these ships were carrying Malaysians.

"They have been delayed because of some sort of engine trouble that they had.

"They set sail from Ireland and have a longer distance to go but they still intend to go ahead towards Gaza," he said in an interview with the Al-Jazeera cable news today.

Eleven Malaysians, including a journalist and a cameraman from Astro Awani, were reported to be on board the Turkish ship, Mavi Marmara, which was attacked by Israeli forces off the Gaza coast yesterday morning. At least 10 people were reported killed in the attack.

According to the PGPO, Malaysians are sponsoring three ships - Rachel, Challenger 1 and Challenger - which are joining six ships from other international humanitarian aid groups such as the Turkish Relief Foundation, European Campaign to End the Siege of Gaza and Swedish and Greek Boat to Gaza Initiatives.

Asked about the possibility of a confrontation like what happened yesterday, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, if the Israeli navy stops the ship, I suppose they cannot fight against the Israelis who are armed with guns and are ready to kill."

"But their mission is to take these aids to Gaza and they will proceed until they are stopped. And if they are stopped, they will appeal for safe passage because they are not combatants, they carry no arms, they are trying to help people in distress," he added.

On claims by Israel that people on board the ship have links to Hamas and Al Qaeda, he said it was not true as there were many nationalities on board.

Asked whether there had been any communication between the Israeli authority and the organisers of the flotilla, Dr Mahathir said they had not received anything.

PGPO advisor Mukhriz Mahathir said that because Malaysia had no diplomatic relations with Israel, that country had no right to detain or hold any Malaysians in their territory.

"This is a form of kidnapping and we demand that any Malaysians detained by Israel be released immediately.

"What's worse is that the flotilla is carrying an international group of peace activists from around the world," he said in a statement.

He said there was no reason whatsoever for the Israeli troops to board any civilian ship outside their territory, what more a ship carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza.

"The attack by the Israeli navy is not only a form of piracy but also a form of international terrorism. The attack threatened the lives of women, children and senior citizens on board the ship.

"This is clear proof of the hypocrisy of the international governments which allowed this attack to take place," he said.

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