

DIPLOMATIC EFFORT TO FREE 23 MALAYSIANS

Anwar in contact with other leaders to secure release of detained activists

KUALA LUMPUR

ALL 23 Malaysian volunteers with the Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF) have been detained by Israeli forces, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday.

However, the Sumud Nusantara Command Centre (SNCC), which has been monitoring the progress of the flotilla, only has information on 15 Malaysians detained by Israel.

The prime minister said he and other leaders have been in contact with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed Abdulrahman Al Thani and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"I am also in contact with the office of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi," he said.

Anwar added that he and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan had reached out to other leaders, including United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio, requesting that they intervene to secure the release of those detained by Israel.

He said the detainees were accused of wrongdoing "simply because of their concern for humanitarian principles, helping the weak and the hungry, including the sick, women and children".

"If that cannot be accepted, it means our humanitarian values are meaningless. Once again, I pray to Allah for an end to Israel's

cruelty, for our friends to be freed and for humanitarian aid to reach our friends in Gaza, Palestine, without delay."

He also demanded the immediate release of the Malaysians and all GSF volunteers.

"Free them immediately! Do not act cruelly and unjustly towards Malaysian and international activists and volunteers.

"The safety of Malaysians is a priority and we will never remain silent when their rights and dignity are violated," he said in a Facebook post.

However, he said he was working through diplomatic channels and stakeholders to secure the immediate release of all Malaysians and other activists detained by Israel.

"My team and I are actively engaging with relevant stakeholders, including through diplomatic channels, in efforts to ensure the immediate release of Malaysian, Asean and international volunteers and activists."

Anwar also expressed solidarity with the families of those detained, offering words of encouragement and support.

"To the families of the activists and volunteers, may you be granted strength and resilience in facing this challenging time. Updates on each step towards their release will be communicated from time to time."

Anwar called on Malaysians to pray for the safety of the detainees.

"Let us all join in prayer, so that all detainees, especially Malaysian citizens, remain safe and protected."

Anwar also shared details of his phone conversations with SNCC director-general Datuk Dr Sani Araby Abdul Alim.

The GSF involves some 500 activists from 44 countries. Among the prominent personalities in the flotilla are climate activist Greta Thunberg and Mandla Mandela, the grandson of former South African president Nelson Mandela.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the government would not compromise on the safety of the detained Malaysians.

He said the interception of the convoy was another display of Israel's contempt for international law and human life.

"Once more, the world sees Israel's true face as a colonialist regime that does not respect the law and human life," he said in a Facebook post.

"The GSF carries volunteers and vital supplies to ease Palestinians' suffering from inhumane blockades, yet, it is met with intimidation and violence."

In **Kota Tinggi**, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin said the release of the detained must be pursued through diplomatic channels.

Perikatan Nasional condemned the interception of GSF and detention of its volunteers.

Opposition leader Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin said the matter was an example of the "barbaric and cruel attitude of the Zionist regime" under Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Page 1 pix: Pictures of the 23 Malaysians detained by the Israeli military; A screen grab from a live-stream showing crew raising their hands after Israeli forces boarded the 'Florida', a vessel in the Global Sumud Flotilla.