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Haniyeh thanks Palestine convoy

Hamas leader Haniyeh presented a personally signed shawl decorated with the Palestinian flag to the Palestine convoy. He also gave IHH president a letter to be delivered to Turkish prime minister.



Haniyeh thanks Palestine convoy

Ismail Haniyeh, the prime minister of Hamas-ruled government in the Gaza Strip, received at his office a group of representatives from Freedom to Palestine Convoy, which managed to enter Gaza after a three-week travelling and waiting. Bülent Yıldırım, the president of the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, members of the IHH executive board and Mazlumder Chairperson Ahmet Faruk Ünsal were present during the visit.

Haniyeh presented his guests with shawls decorated with the Palestinian flag and gave Yıldırım a letter to be delivered to Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Haniyeh said he invited Erdoğan to Gaza in his letter.

Hamas leader thanked people of Turkey and the convoy participants for travelling thousands of miles to deliver humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza.

Haniyeh delivered a speech during the visit saying "All Palestinians respect you. You have crossed long distances to reach Gaza. We have been following your journey from its start, experiencing and feeling what you experienced and feeling, and prayed to Allah smooth passage of your trip. Gazan people are very happy and relieved now that you have arrived here. I see this visit as an opportunity and present my love and respect to the people, the leaders and the government of Turkey. Turkey has never forgotten Palestine in history, but only lost its interest for a brief period. But Turkey is now returning to Palestine, al-Quds with all its resources. This is a blessing from Allah, justice of Turkish people. This is also a proof of Erdoğan's nobleness. This is the policy of the AK Party as well.

"We are especially proud of Turkey's stance on the Gaza war. That political stance made us happier that all this aid could make. The entire world watched how Turkish PM shouted at the leader of the Zionist. It was not only Turkey's anger, indignation at Israel but also an expression of everyone opposing Israel. And this attitude made everyone pleased. AK Party and Saadet Party offered us extensive support during the Gaza war. We also watched the protest organized by Saadet Party in Turkey's largest city with the attendance of one million people."

Hamas leader thanked the IHH for its help. "The IHH has particularly delivered substantial amount of aid to the people of Gaza. IHH President Bülent Yıldırım offered help and stood beside our side during the war. This is an example of Islamic fraternity, an indication that we are all parts of the same umma. Muslims are like walls reinforcing each other. Welcome. Gaza is proud of you. I pray to Allah that we will pray together in al-Quds freely one day," he said.

'Our new goal is to break embargo with ships'

IHH President Yıldırım said they would make embargo meaningless by bringing aid to Palestine in ships after the completion of convoy action.

Yıldırım criticized Egypt for impeding the convoy and praised Jordan and Syria for their contributions. "Egypt broke all its promises. Egypt is to lose the most in this process," Yıldırım said and added they would always be with the people of Gaza and face hunger if Gazan people have to do so.

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Recalling that his shirt is still covered with stains of blood of the activists who were injured in the attack by Egyptian police at Arish port, Yıldırım stated "I will keep this blood-stained shirt all my life."

Regarding the wall being built by Egypt along the Gaza border he asserted "This wall will destroy its builders not Gaza. Egypt is constructing this wall as a barrier between the world and itself. I hope it will realize its mistake."

Keys to vehicles handed over

The keys to the 145 vehicles brought along the convoy were handed over to Gaza authorities in a ceremony held at 11:00 a.m. IHH president, Turkish MPs Murat Mercan, Hüsnü Tuna, Mehmet Nil Hidir, Seracettin Karayağız, Cemal Yılmaz Demir, deputy chairperson of Saadet Party Temel Karamollaoğlu, Ahmad al-Kurd, Hamas minister of social affairs, and British MP George Galloway attended the ceremony.

Turkish lawmaker Mercan said "Today we are where the humanity has lost. The heart of the whole world beats in Gaza. We all gathered in Gaza, humanity gathered in Gaza. No force can destroy the will of people. I am presenting the regards of people and prime minister of Turkey to the people of Gaza. I thank the IHH for organizing this convoy."

Details from convoy

The Palestine convoy entered Gaza travelling 4,600 kilometers overland. It faced many obstacles along the route, most of them caused by Egypt.

It was forced to wait in Jordan's Aqaba port for five days and then turn back to Syria. The vehicles were transferred to Arish port via sea in a 25-hour voyage, while the activists were transferred to Arish in a rented plane. The plane had to make three flights between Latakia and Arish to transfer 500 activists.

The plane belonging to a Syrian airline company broke down after making its first flight. The remaining activists, who had to wait in Damascus for long hours, were transferred in another plane rented from Greece. The convoy attracted attention from the world public even before it entered Gaza. There were 500 activists from 17 countries, which helped draw international attention. The oldest person in the convoy was İsmet Erdemir, 71, and the youngest was Beyza Nur Karaduman, 18. Seven Turkish women took part in the convoy.

The convoy composed of 200 vehicles such as ambulances, minibuses, trailers, buses and passenger cars, 47 of them from the United States, 80 from Britain and 73 from Turkey. All the vehicles donated by Turkey were decorated in the colors of the Palestinian flags.

The convoy entered Gaza after a three-week travel and waiting period. It spent four days in Turkey, eight days in Syria, seven days in Jordan and two days in Egypt.

The route of the convoy: Britain, France, Italy, Greece, Turkey (through the cities of Istanbul, Adapazarı, Ankara, Konya, Adana, Gaziantep), Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Gaza (5 January 2009).

Timeline of the convoy:

6 December departure from Britain

15 December crossing into Turkey

16 December press conference in Istanbul

17 December in Ankara and Konya

18 December in Adana and Gaziantep

19 December crossing into Syria

21 December crossing into Jordan

27 December departure from Aqaba, Jordan

29 December night accommodation in Damascus, Syria

4 January 2010 voyage from Latakia into Egypt

5 January crossing into Gaza

Egyptian hurdles against the convoy made it appear on the world agenda more often.

The convoy was not limited to organization of a civil society organization. Turkish and Syrian authorities, particularly the Turkish Foreign Ministry, exerted considerable effort to help the convoy achieve its goals.

Egypt issued a note to the Turkish Foreign Ministry over the convoy. Turkish PM Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu delivered speeches supporting convoy's entry into Gaza.

Egyptian police attacked the convoy at Arish port, injuring 40 people. The scene of the clash between the activists and the police and Egypt's stand was condemned by world

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countries.

The embargo imposed on Palestine was for the first time ever brought to the attention of the world without presence of situation of hot conflict. Freedom to Palestine Convoy put pressure on Israel. The convoy also helped show to the entire Islamic world that Egypt is complicit in the embargo on Gaza. The Egyptian effort to impede the convoy was protested by all Muslim countries even in Egypt itself.



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