

Open Letter to Stephen Harper

By Kevin Neish, Farooq Burney and Rifat Audeh

June 14, 2010

We are writing to express our outrage and indignation over our government's despicable silence on what took place in the Mediterranean Sea on May 31, 2010. We are referring, of course, to the piracy, murder and kidnappings by Israel against the Turkish humanitarian aid ship in general, and the actions against the Canadians on the ship in particular.

In 2006, Israel launched a heinous war on Lebanon that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians. You, Mr. Harper, described Israel's action as a "measured response", and this implicit green light and tacit approval from Canada to Israel to continue the rampage of death and destruction killed eight Canadians within a couple of days.

Following this, the cold-blooded Israeli murder of a Canadian peacekeeper and three of his colleagues at a UN station in Southern Lebanon resulted in your outrageous and absolutely despicable remark effectively blaming the victims and asking what they were doing there in the first place.

On May 31st and in international waters, Israel attacked an unarmed humanitarian aid ship before the whole world, murdered nine civilians aboard and wounded dozens, and kidnapped the rest and detained them illegally. We were on that ship along with many other internationals.

And this time around, what was the response of our government? Once again, Canada did not condemn Israel's barbaric actions and refused to demand our release, with Peter Kent incredibly stating "Canada doesn't believe a lot of noise is required in this instance."

It would be a gross understatement to say that we are appalled at the muted response of our government in general and with any politician who did not speak out against what took place. Canada and Canadians are loved throughout the world for many reasons, including their willingness to stand for what is right, peacekeeping efforts and compassion for global citizens in suffering. So why is it that the government has participated in an inhumane siege on 1.5 million people that we were trying to break with this flotilla? Hundreds of innocent men, women and children have died in the past few years as a result of this crippling blockade and lack of access to necessary medical care.

Further, why has the government not called Israel out on this piracy and blatant violation of international law? Why didn't Ottawa summon the Israeli ambassador to express its outrage, or at the very least demand an explanation? Why didn't you rebuke Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu when he was meeting with you since you knew full well that the attack took place in international waters?

Finally, why, at the very least didn't the Canadian government demand our release and try to protect its citizens? Receiving a visit from embassy representatives falls far short of what we'd expect from our government. Is this the best that Canadians can hope for in the future? In cases such as this, silence

equals complicity.

Our government's action –or rather inaction – is a disgrace. In assisting with the slow genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza and falling silent before Israel's acts of piracy, murder and abduction, our government has not only tarnished the image of Canada and Canadians throughout the world, but has also shown its weakness and inability to stand up for those oppressed.

Shame on us for keeping silent.

(Kevin Neish, Farooq Burney and Rifat Audeh were the three Canadians aboard the Mavi Marmara ship when it was attacked by the Israeli navy in international waters.)