



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bilbao Airport Assault on Flotilla Survivors After Suffering Horrific Physical Abuse By iOF Exposes israel's Exported Framework of Brutality

May 23, 2026 BILBAO, BASQUE COUNTRY — The Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF) expresses its profound outrage and condemnation following a violent assault by the Ertzaintza (Basque autonomous police) against newly returned flotilla participants at Bilbao Airport. These activists, having just survived days of systematic abduction, torture, and severe psychological and physical violence at the hands of the israeli Occupation Forces (iOF), were met not with sanctuary, but with immediate, targeted police brutality upon stepping onto their home soil.

When a family member, waiting anxiously in the arrivals terminal, attempted to cross a barrier to embrace their loved ones, the Ertzaintza suddenly and shockingly responded with violence. What should have been a moment of relief and familial comfort after such a harrowing experience was interrupted by even more brutality.

Among those attacked and beaten by the Basque police were individuals who had just recently been discharged from medical facilities to fly home, bearing severe, agonizing injuries from their time in israel's captivity, after being illegally abducted in European international waters. The Ertzaintza's deployment of force against citizens in acute medical agony represents an unconscionable failure of basic humanity and continued display of systemic and colonial violence.

At least four people, including three flotilla participants, were subsequently arrested by Spanish state paramilitary police and are currently being held at Deusto police station in Bilbao.

Even in the midst of this unprovoked assault, GSF volunteers demonstrated the same protective solidarity they had developed under iOF brutalisation: shielding one another from baton strikes with their own bodies. In one such example, a flotilla participant, who was hospitalised just days earlier with broken ribs, could be seen throwing himself over a fellow participant to absorb the blows. This is a testament to the indestructible humanity of those this global machinery of repression seeks to crush, as they have attempted to do with anyone standing in solidarity with Palestine.

The Global Web of Repression: A Shared Methodology

What took place at Bilbao Airport is not an isolated case of local police mismanagement; it is a chilling demonstration of interconnected global repression.

Just as the israeli regime expanded its purview of lawlessness against the Palestinian people into international waters to illegally intercept, abduct, and terrorize civilian

activists on the high seas, it has effectively exported its structural violence directly into the heart of the Basque Country. It is a matter of public record that the Ertzaintza has maintained deep, historical procurement pipelines, commercial contracts, and tactical training ties with Israeli private security firms, including Guardian Defense & Homeland Security and ISDS—entities led by former Israeli military and intelligence operatives.

The continuity of violence is undeniable:

- **In International Waters & Ashdod:** Flotilla volunteers were subjected to horrific tactical violence, including close-range rubber bullets, tasers, broken bones, and weaponized sexual degradation, violence and abuse, including rape.
- **At Bilbao Airport:** Survivors bearing many of those exact fractures and traumas were greeted by regional police utilizing the very same brutal tactics normalized by Israeli security doctrines as well as countries around the world who are accomplices to Israel's atrocities.

"It's chilling to see how the knee placed down on our volunteer's head was done exactly the same way the IOF used to immobilise us," stated Javi Aparente, a GSF participant just released from Israeli custody.

The Global Sumud Flotilla demands an immediate, independent international investigation into the coordinated violence unleashed at Bilbao Airport, explicitly examining how regional autonomous forces initiated these brutal beatings and how state paramilitary police facilitated the arbitrary arrests of traumatized survivors. We demand the immediate termination of all security, surveillance, and tactical contracts between Basque institutions and Israeli security firms, cutting off the pipeline that imports counter-insurgency warfare into our communities.

There must be absolute accountability for this global franchise of repression, wherever it operates. The criminalisation of human rights defenders must end. The state apparatuses that target those standing in solidarity with the Palestinian people must be dismantled.

MEDIA CONTACT

Email: media@globalsumudflotilla.org

Tel: +44 1414 620 950

Website: globalsumudflotilla.org

Submit press inquiries [here](#).

Social: [@globalsumudflotilla](#) [@wavesofsumud](#)

Follow our announcements on [telegram](#).