



PRESS RELEASE

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Global Sumud Flotilla Releases Horrific, Newly Emerging Testimonies as Survivors Return Home

'Not a Single Person Without Injury'

May 24, 2026 **INTERNATIONAL** – As civilian participants from the Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF) begin landing in their respective home countries and some continue their recovery in Istanbul, the full, devastating scale of the violence executed by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) is being laid bare. Following the most recent unlawful interception of the flotilla in international waters on 18 May, newly emerging and harrowing testimonies confirm a coordinated campaign of systematic torture, severe physical and psychological trauma, and targeted gender-based and sexual violence.

(The violence reported in this release covers only the second of two illegal Israeli interceptions that took place during the Spring 2026 flotilla mission; the first attack took place on 29 April off the coast of Crete, which also had numerous reports of sexual violence, rape and physical injuries including 35 people requiring medical care for broken noses, ribs and injuries from rubber bullets deployed by the IOF.)

"I don't think there's a single person without some kind of injury," stated GSF volunteer Catriona Graham, summarizing the condition of the 428 civilian detainees.

The Catastrophic Medical Toll: at least 67 participants were taken to Hospital

New data reveals the alarming level of trauma inflicted on civilian human rights defenders and journalists during their detention. While hundreds were received by the local Turkish forensic team for an initial medical check for injuries sustained at the hands of the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), at least 67 people suffered injuries so severe requiring further medical evaluation in the state hospital, and 12 participants were hospitalized: 9 in Turkey and 3 in Greece. Five individuals have been discharged today. However, the medical repercussions of the assault remain critical:

- **Stranded by Severe Trauma:** Arno Meys, a flotilla captain, is currently healing from a punctured lung. Due to strict medical recommendations regarding his injuries, he is completely unable to fly for the next month.
- **Ongoing Hospitalizations:** Two participants remain hospitalized. One is being held under observation for a broken foot that continues to bleed, caused by being fired upon at point-blank range, by what is believed to be a beanbag round.

- **Internal Trauma:** A second participant remains hospitalized under continuous monitoring for concerns regarding internal bleeding and cardiac arrhythmia, alongside a broken leg.

These severe cases corroborate earlier reports that documented at least 36 distinct bone fractures, broken ribs, and severe torso injuries across the fleet. Medics reported treating volunteers who were struggling to breathe due to the sheer agony of their shattered ribs, while others suffered severe head injuries and loss of consciousness.

New Testimonies: Terror Inside the Shipping Containers

As survivors begin speaking to the press upon arrival in their home nations, a shared experience of calculated barbarism—and profound solidarity—is emerging:

- **The French Delegation:** In a chilling personal testimony, French delegate Meriem Hadjal described being dragged toward a dark shipping container by soldiers multiple times her size. *"I take the first blow. Slaps that knock you out... Everything happens at the level of the head."* Terrified of being raped, she resisted as a soldier repeatedly touched her, while a second soldier pulled at her chest and pants. Inside the container, she witnessed a third soldier torturing another volunteer on the ground with a taser. Another soldier grabbed her by the hair, beating her head while demanding she show her face. When the container door briefly opened, she recounted, *"what I mainly see on the ground, because I don't look up, are bloodstains."* Meriem noted she, along with other detainees, were stripped naked, removing any warm clothes and crammed into splintered containers where they could hear their *"comrades, one by one, screaming, because they were being beaten to a pulp."*
- **The Polish Delegation:** Karim Awad, a medic holding dual Polish and UK citizenship, recounted being choked with a torn Palestinian flag by an iOF soldier. Awad was subsequently subjected to continuous stomping to the head by six soldiers. Because he had written "Free Palestine" on his body, he was singled out for multiple strip searches, severe beatings with a hand-held metal detector, and having his hair ripped out. He further revealed that the iOF systematically flooded the floors of the dark shipping containers with cold water every few hours to prevent detainees from sleeping.
- **The Greek Delegation:** Delegates recounted the boarding of the *Kiriakos X*, where soldiers used electric shocks and brutal beatings on the crew to force them to identify their captain. To halt the torture of her crew, the female captain courageously stepped forward to claim responsibility for the boat and volunteers; the iOF responded by shooting her directly in the leg with a rubber bullet. She was wounded and denied proper medical care for days.
- **The South African Delegation:** Two South African delegates, Ebrahim Peters and Qutb Hendricks, provided powerful testimony detailing how iOF soldiers explicitly used geopolitical retaliation as a pretext for torture. Upon discovering the participants' nationality, soldiers dragged them into an isolated room and launched a targeted physical assault. While beating the volunteers, soldiers explicitly referenced international accountability mechanisms, stating, *"You guys want to*

take us to court? We'll show you," referencing South Africa's genocide case against israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

- **The Belgian & Australian Delegations:** 77-year-old Belgian delegate Olimpia Dìez Perlins expressed total shock at the sadism of the forces. Julien Cabral, another Belgian participant noted that soldiers could be heard explicitly saying, *"let's have fun,"* as they initiated the violent attacks. And Australian delegate Juliet Lamont provided further harrowing details, confirming she was sexually assaulted *"in this kind of torture chamber as five men were bashing me and smashing my face."*
- **The Canadian Delegation:** Ehab Lotayef, sailing aboard the *Canadian Boat to Gaza*, was directly asked by iOF personnel to assist them with translation, only to be stabbed in the hand by soldiers the moment he attempted to provide that help.
- **The Brazilian Delegation:** A delegate returning to Brazil, Ariadne Telles, detailed suffering physical and psychological torture. The delegate was subjected to severe sleep deprivation and targeted physical assaults: *"They kicked me on the face, they kicked me on the legs, they zip-tied my hands; I don't feel my fingers until now."* Detainees were forced to sit on their knees with their heads pressed to the floor for hours, while captors laughed.

Indestructible Solidarity

In the face of this "global machinery of repression," the overarching theme of the survivors' return is the indestructible nature of a commitment to collective liberation and solidarity with the Palestinian people. Survivors describe participants throwing their own bodies over comrades to absorb baton strikes, and bound detainees in stress positions desperately massaging the legs of the comrades next to them to keep them from collapsing from pain.

The Global Sumud Flotilla reiterates its urgent demands for an immediate, independent international investigation into these documented war crimes, the immediate implementation of comprehensive arms embargoes, and sanctions against the israeli regime for its systemic violations of international maritime and humanitarian law, the illegal blockade of Gaza and the ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people.

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