

REPORT OF THE SPIRIT OF RACHEL CORRIE MISSION TEAM

JUNE 2011

MISSION: **To Break The Siege On Gaza** **And To Deliver The Humanitarian Aid To Gaza**

TEAM MEMBERS:

1. Matthias Chang, Mission Leader
2. Capt. Abdul Jalil Bin Mansor, Captain, MV Finch
3. Mohammad Jafri Bin Arifin, Chief Officer, MV Finch
4. Zainuddin Bin Mohamed, Chief Engineer, MV Finch
5. Pal Satya Prakash, Able-Seaman, MV Finch
6. Sharma Chandan Shimla, Motorman, MV Finch
7. Derek Graham, Irish Peace Activist
8. Jenny Graham, Irish Peace Activist
9. Julie Levesque, Representative of Global Research, Canada
10. Mohammad Razillah Bin Abdullah, Representative, Felda
11. Mohd Faizal Bin Hassan, Bernama News Agency
12. Iskandar Alang Bin Bendahara, New Straits Times

The team comprises 7 Malaysians, 2 Indian nationals, 2 Irish and 1 Canadian.

The crew manning MV Finch is made up of 3 Malaysians and 2 Indian nationals.



MV Finch/The Spirit of Rachel Corrie

BACKGROUND OF THE MISSION

The Spirit of Rachel Corrie mission to break the illegal siege on Gaza by Israel was initiated by the Perdana Global Peace Foundation (PGPF), founded by the 4th Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. This mission was a follow-up of an earlier mission by the then Perdana Global Peace Organisation (PGPO) the predecessor of PGPF, which funded the ship "Rachel Corrie" in 2010. Rachel Corrie was hijacked by Israeli commandos and forced to sail to Ashdod, Israel. Till today, the ship remained in the custody of the Israelis and the humanitarian aid has yet to be delivered to the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Undaunted by the set-back, PGPF resolved to launch another mission, and appropriately named the mission, "The Spirit of Rachel Corrie" to commemorate the sacrifice by the young American, who was brutally murdered by the Israeli military, when she was mowed down by a bulldozer while preventing the demolition of a Palestinian home.

This Mission is also to remind the peoples of the world that the illegal siege is a flagrant contravention of the Geneva Conventions which inter-alia provides that a nation under occupation is entitled to have access to clean drinking water and sanitary conditions. As a result of the barbaric invasion codenamed "Operation Cast Lead" in 2008, 7.5km of sewage pipes were destroyed. Hence, our cargo of UPVC pipes for sewage to restore the existing sewerage system in Gaza. This aid would prevent the spread of infectious diseases and must by all measures, be recognised as humanitarian aid. It is our hope that our effort would help in due course, to break the siege so that Gaza would be free and not remain the largest open prison in the world and its people no longer subjected to the cruel and inhumane collective punishment by war criminals in Israel.

Preparation began in early August of 2010 when Derek and Jenny Graham were invited by PGPF to come to Malaysia to be part of the Mission Team. Together with Matthias Chang, they were part of the team that sailed on the Rachel Corrie that defied the Israeli navy even after the slaughter of nine innocent peace activists on the ship Mavi Marmara. In late April of 2011, Julie Levesque from Canada joined the team.

On April 25, 2011, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad officially launched "The Spirit of Rachel Corrie Mission" in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to demonstrate once again our determination and resolve to defy the illegal and inhumane blockade of Gaza by Israel. Funds were raised through public donation and as they say, the rest is history. We can say without any fear of contradiction that we volunteered for the Mission because of the vision of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad and his dedication to the just cause of the Palestinians to be free and to live in peace.

CHRONOLOGY

The members of the Mission Team left Malaysia for Greece on diverse dates between 27th April and early May to sail to Gaza.

The Mission Team was ably assisted by a dedicated and remarkable colleague, Haji Shamsul Azhar, the Head of the Land Team in Kuala Lumpur who ensured every comfort and support were available to our team members. His commitment and discipline was exemplary and an inspiration to all the team members.

On 2nd May 2011, we concluded the purchase of the ship "Ariadne" and immediately

commenced preparations to sail to Gaza. What would have taken three to four weeks for such an endeavour was completed in six days and we obtained the permit to sail on 10th May. The ship was renamed "MV Finch" for operational reasons.

On the 11th May 2011, we left the port of Piraeus, Athens with determination and high hopes of success, notwithstanding the fact that in the preceding months, the prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu has called upon governments and the Secretary-General of the United Nations to prevent any effort by peace activists to break the illegal and inhumane siege on Gaza. Subsequently, the Secretary-General had the audacity to issue a statement that all humanitarian aid must go through legal channels and sanctioned by Israel, in an insidious attempt to legitimise the illegal and inhumane blockade of Gaza. Yet, in a U.N. report on the invasion of Gaza in 2008 by Israel, the Israeli military was found to have committed war crimes!

At about 0300 hrs (3.00 am), the team assembled on the deck of the ship and on the bridge for the final approach to Gaza, with anticipation and determination. We readied ourselves to confront all eventualities, including facing enemy fire, hijacking and illegal arrest.

At 0605 hrs (6.05 am) on 16th May, 2011, after sailing for six days, undetected by Israeli and Egyptian navies and their sophisticated radar and surveillance system, we entered Palestinian waters, right inside the so-called "Security Area L" imposed by Israel to prevent any ships sailing into and out of the Gaza port. We had sailed almost one mile inside the "security zone" and were approximately 0.5 nautical miles (about 900 meters) from the shore, when the Israeli navy spotted our presence and challenged our right to sail to Gaza.

From the radio conversation, on VHF channel 16 (the general radio channel for communications at sea), between the Israeli commander and Captain Jalil Bin Mansor (Capt. Jalil) it is abundantly clear that the Israeli navy was caught napping. The patrol craft sped towards our ship at full speed. The commander of the Israeli navy vessel enquired where the ship was heading, obviously astounded by the sight of a cargo ship in Palestinian waters, right inside the Security Zone. What a sight to behold for the Palestinian fishermen who were out fishing, pointing to us the direction for Gaza. But, a nightmare scenario for the Israeli navy!

Capt. Jalil calmly, but firmly informed the Israeli commander that he was instructed to head to Gaza to deliver UPVC pipes for sewage, that he had a crew of five and seven passengers, unarmed and the ship had no weapons, ammunitions and or contraband cargo. The commander replied that we cannot proceed to Gaza port and that if we wanted to discharge the cargo, we could either sail to the port of Ashdod in Israel or to El Arish port in Egypt. At this stage, there were no threats or gunfire, as from the radio transmissions, it was audible that the military personnel were asking for instructions from Headquarters. There was also a call by the commander to the Egyptian navy for assistance, but no help was forthcoming from the Egyptian navy, as obviously it was not possible to render assistance as the ship was in Palestinian waters.

It was only when Capt. Jalil insisted on proceeding to Gaza that the Israeli navy became belligerent and for the first time fired across the ship's bow with its heavy machine gun. Five passengers on the deck of the ship were exposed to this reckless gunfire as they had no idea as to the direction of the gun fire, and what the Israelis were targeting and were not able to take such necessary measures to protect themselves. Attempts to alert the global media and the land team were not successful because they were unable to receive satellite signals

whilst under intense fire. The Israeli patrol craft circled our ship and fired a second time from the starboard side and a third time from the port side. Notwithstanding this blatant and unwarranted military action, Capt. Jalil insisted that we had a right to sail to Gaza and that the security zone was illegal. Whereupon, the Israeli navy, so typical of their training and attitude threatened to shoot the crew and passengers, should we fail to turn round and head for Egyptian territorial waters.

Our strategy in those circumstances was to beach the ship on the shores of Gaza, but time and distance (even though a mere 900 meters) prevented us from doing so. Capt. Jalil, to avoid unnecessary risks of death or injury to the crew and passengers turned the ship round and was forced to head towards Egyptian waters. And even as we were turning, the cowardly Israeli navy let off another burst of machine gun fire at our ship and at the Palestinian fishermen in small vulnerable fishing boats, who were near our ship. Whereupon the captain of the Egyptian navy, radioed the Israeli commander to stop firing at our ship.

When we were forced into Egyptian waters, the Egyptian patrol craft escorted our ship to El Arish port. The Egyptian navy personnel came on board our ship and examined the cargo and the entire ship and confirmed officially that we were carrying humanitarian aid, UPVC pipes for sewage and had no weapons, ammunitions or contraband goods.

At 1420 hrs, we anchored in the waiting area of the port.

Soon after, we were informed by the Egyptian navy that arrangements were being made for the discharge of the cargo for delivery to Gaza.

Subsequently, we received communication from the representative of the Ministry of Environment in Gaza that arrangements have been made with the Red Crescent to have the cargo delivered via Rafah and that they would be waiting for us at the said crossing.

Nothing happened and after a lapse of 2 days, we were told that the port authority had no problems in discharging the cargo, and that the problem was allegedly created by the Malaysian government. We were surprised by this information as there were communications between the Foreign Ministers of Malaysia and Egypt to resolve the matter.

On 19th May, 2011, we requested permission to berth the ship for supplies of provision and water but our request was refused by the port authority. Nevertheless, we proceeded to head towards the port, and when we approached the port entrance, the Egyptian navy stopped us and forced us to turn round and head out to three nautical miles from shore for further instructions.

Later in the day, we were supplied with provisions and fresh water. This was a temporary relief. On the 22nd May, 2011, we were supplied with additional drinking water.

On the 23rd May, 2011, we made another request to berth the ship and informed the port authority that its refusal would be construed as an "official refusal to allow MV Finch to dock and discharge the cargo". In those circumstances, we informed the port authority, that we would have no choice but to proceed to the next nearest port, i.e. Gaza port.

Not having received any permission to dock, the team unanimously decided to depart from the port and at 1445 hrs (2.45 pm) we proceeded to Gaza. But soon after, the Egyptian navy intercepted us and demanded that we sail out to international waters as we were not allowed

to go to Gaza from Egyptian waters.

At the point of 7 nautical miles from shore, we received a message from a member of our land team, quoting that the High Ambassador from the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested we return to the port. However, we continued our journey, but we failed to sail any further as our Aqua Pilot steering system broke down and we had to stop our engines and sought assistance from the Egyptian navy. A tug boat was requested but the same was not available. Attempts to repair the steering system were made and eventually, it was partially repaired and under the escort of the Egyptian navy, we limped back to the waiting area of the port and as requested by the Foreign Ministry of Egypt.

Later in the evening, we were informed that an agreement was reached between the Malaysian and Egyptian government and that a clearance order was issued bearing number 144991/5 to allow our ship to dock and discharge the cargo.

On the 25th May, 2011, we were informed that a new condition had to be complied before the cargo was allowed to be discharged – that we had to produce the Certificate of Origin for the cargo. We were also informed that the Egyptian government had issued a statement that by the 28th of May, 2011, the Rafah crossing would be permanently opened. This news gave us hope that our humanitarian aid would be allowed to be delivered via the Rafah Crossing.

On the 26th May, 2011, the Certificate of Origin, as requested was delivered to the Egyptian authorities and as such we believed that there would be no further delays or obstacles to the discharge of the cargo.

However, we discovered that a new condition was imposed for the cargo to be discharged - the Malaysian government had to agree that the cargo was to be delivered via the land port of Kareem Shalom, Israel. The team was not consulted nor our agreement to this unreasonable condition sought. We disagreed with this new condition as it is contradictory to the objective of our Mission – to break the illegal siege. Therefore, to agree to this new condition would tantamount to condoning the illegal siege. We then issued a Press Statement rejecting this new condition. We refer to Appendix 1 annexed hereto.

On the 27th May, 2011, we were informed that the entire crew and passengers, numbering 12 in total would be allowed to disembark at 1700 hrs (5.00 pm) and the new crew would be allowed to sign-on and take over command of the ship to facilitate the discharge of the cargo. At the appointed time, and without any prior warnings, as we were about to get off the ship and on to the waiting crew boat, we were told that the two Indian national crew members were not allowed to disembark. This problem was quickly resolved when the Indian Ambassador proactively intervened and obtained permission for the two Indian crew members to disembark and return home directly from Cairo.

Immediately after the above issue was resolved, we were told that all eleven members of the team can disembark except Matthias Chang, the team leader, on grounds of security. It should be noted that at all material times, this issue was never raised from 16th May to the 27th May, 2011. We therefore, question the turn of events and the sincerity of the relevant authorities in imposing the new condition. If Matthias Chang, the team leader was in fact an obstacle (a security threat), why then was the team told initially that all 12 members could disembark? In 2009, following the successful delivery of humanitarian aid by the Viva Palestina Land Convoy, for which Matthias Chang participated, all the activists were deported and told that they would never be allowed to return to Egypt. Yet, in 2010 Matthias Chang

acting as the personal representative of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad to deliver his speech in Gaza at the International Conference of Detainees Incarcerated in Israeli prisons, was allowed entry after being initially detained for nine hours and having demanded that he be deported if entry was refused. Therefore, if he had been previously allowed entry to Egypt and the authorities had full knowledge and details of Matthias Chang, it is indeed strange that he had now become a security threat, more so when the Foreign Ministers of Egypt and Malaysia have announced an agreement to allow our ship to dock, to discharge the cargo, and the passengers and crew to disembark and return home.

The team then held a meeting and unanimously decided that all passengers and crew must disembark together or not at all. The team therefore remained on board the ship in defiance of the new condition imposed. Later in the evening, we were joined by a team of five new crews which gave rise to a situation whereby the port authority has contravened international regulations on safety by overloading the ship beyond the mandated number of crew and passengers, not exceeding 12 in total. We protested vehemently to this flagrant breach of regulations, but the port authority as well as the Egyptian navy ignored our just protests and forced us to sail out to deeper waters thereby endangering the lives and safety of all the personnel on board the ship.

On the 28th May, 2011, as a result of the intolerable condition on board the ship, the new crew demanded that they be allowed to disembark. Fortunately, the port authority complied with the demands and the safety of the remaining crew and passengers was safeguarded once again.

During this period, we encountered on two occasions, shortage of water and provisions and had to use sea water to clean ourselves to maintain hygiene and for personal use. Instead of allowing our ship to berth and have fresh water pumped into our tank, we had to have our water supplied by way of 20 litres plastic containers which had to be poured out via a small funnel into the water tank filling pipe, one container at a time, requiring the combined efforts of all the crew and passengers.

On the 31st May, 2011, three Malaysian members of the team, decided to disembark and returned home.

On the 1st June, 2011, we were told that eight remaining crew and passengers with the exception of Matthias Chang were allowed to disembark and return home. However, it was the unanimous decision of the eight to remain on board and insisted that either all remaining nine be allowed to disembark or none at all. The team remained united and determined to defy this unreasonable condition, an obvious attempt to split the team and isolate our team leader. It was heartening to learn soon after that Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad had personally telephoned Christopher Chang, the son of Matthias Chang that he fully endorsed the decision of the eight members of the team to stay on board with their leader. There was also a proposal from the authorities that after the eight remaining passengers have disembarked, Matthias Chang would be allowed to sail out to another country and from there return home. This proposal was also rejected.

On the same day, Matthias Chang received a personal communication from the member of Egyptian Parliament, the Hon. Dr. Hazem Farouk requesting that Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad write a letter to the prime minister of Egypt, the Rt. Honourable Dr. Essam Sharaf to resolve the impasse. On the 2nd June, 2011, we received official confirmation that the letter from Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad was received by the prime minister and that he had

given specific instructions to the Foreign Minister of Egypt to take immediate action to resolve the problems.

Finally, at 1000 hrs (10.00 am), 3rd June, 2011, the remaining team members were allowed to disembark on the condition that they be driven directly to Cairo airport, put on Egyptian Airways to fly home via Bangkok. Our two Indian colleagues flew home a day later, on the 4th June 2011.

As at today, the cargo has yet to be discharged from our ship.

A further request has been made by the Member of Egyptian Parliament, Dr. Hazem Farouk to Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad to send another letter to the prime minister of Egypt to intervene and allow the cargo to be discharged and warehoused pending delivery to Gaza via Rafah. This letter has in fact been sent to the prime minister. Matthias Chang has also sent a similar letter to the prime minister for which an acknowledgement has been received and an assurance that action will be taken to discharge the cargo. Please see Appendix 2 annexed herewith.

CONCLUSION

As an NGO, the PGPF mounted this Mission with determination and resolve knowing that there would be numerous difficulties and the fact that its members were all volunteers, had no extensive training for such an operation. It is their sense of duty and high ideals that motivated them to assist the Palestinians in their just struggle to break the illegal siege of Gaza by Israel and to bring to the world's attention, the continuing sufferings of the heroic Palestinian people imprisoned in the largest Open Prison, and as victims of the Israeli policy of collective punishment.

The team overcame numerous difficulties and obstacles and emerged stronger, united and determined to continue their efforts to assist the Palestinians.

We would like to thank one and all who have rendered their support and their prayers for our safety and we hope that they will continue to support our struggle to free Palestine.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank especially Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad and Tun Siti Hasmah for their constant support before, during and after the Mission and for welcoming us at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, in spite the fact that Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad had just recently being discharged from the National Heart Institute.

Finally, we pledge our continued commitment to support the Palestinians in their struggle for Freedom and Statehood and to participate in further missions to break the illegal and inhumane siege of Gaza.

Dated this 9th day of June 2011.

APPENDIX 1 - PRESS STATEMENT FROM THE SPIRIT OF RACHEL CORRIE

11am Egyptian Time

The Spirit of Rachel Corrie Mission hereby objects to the use of an Israeli land port to deliver its humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.

The team is thankful to the Malaysian Government for their negotiations with the Egyptian Government in securing the docking of MV Finch into the El-Arish Port since May 16th.

We have been informed that the Egyptian Government has imposed on the Malaysian Government as a condition precedent for the cargo to be discharged, that the same be transported via Kareem Shalom, at the Israeli border in Gaza.

The team was never consulted in the negotiations nor was its opinion taken into consideration by the Egyptian Government.

This decision is against the principle of the team's mission, which is to break the illegal siege of Gaza by the Israelis.

Have we agreed to the cargo being unloaded via Israel, we would have agreed on the 16th of May, when the Israeli navy demanded that we proceed to Ashdod.

However, we insisted in proceeding to Gaza Port and were then attacked brutally by the Israeli navy.

On 28th April 2011, the Foreign Ministry of Egypt issued a statement that the Rafah Crossing would be permanently opened to enable humanitarian aid to pass through Gaza.

It is therefore in contradiction and inconsistent with our intent that our cargo should now be diverted via Israel and with the expressed permission of Israel which we did not and will not seek in any circumstances.

To comply with this unreasonable demand would abrogate the fundamental principle by which we embarked on this mission – to break the illegal siege of Gaza.

In addition, we are not assured that this cargo would in fact be delivered to Gaza, as in the past, all assurances given to previous missions were not implemented and most of the humanitarian aid were laid to waste, only 40% was allowed to enter Gaza.

For the past 10 days, we were given repeated assurances by the Egyptian Government that the cargo of PVC pipes to restore the destroyed sewerage system would in fact be transported via Rafah.

This turn of events demonstrates the insincerity of the Egyptian Government and their implicit endorsement of the illegal siege when they explicitly stated they would permanently open the Rafah Crossing to humanitarian aid, and as this aid will prevent the spread of infectious diseases must be considered humanitarian aid.

We are therefore compelled to take drastic action to uphold the dignity of the Palestinian people and the justice of the cause. Any compromise of this fundamental principle would

undermine the heroic struggle of the Palestinians in the last few years to resist the cruel and inhumane blockade of Gaza, the largest open prison in the world and a collective punishment of the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza.

This is a unanimous decision of the team which consists of a crew of 5 comprising 3 Malaysians and 2 Indians, and 7 activists made up of 4 Malaysians, 2 Irish and 1 Canadian, expressing and representing the aspirations of all people who support the just struggle of the Palestinians to break the inhumane and illegal siege.

This illegal siege by Israel is a contravention of the Geneva Conventions which inter alia provides that a nation under occupation is entitled to have access to clean drinking water and sanitary conditions.

As a result of the barbaric invasion codenamed "Operation Cast Lead" in 2008, 7.5km of sewage pipes were destroyed. Yet, our cargo of 7.5km PVC pipes, a humanitarian aid to restore the existing sewerage system, has been denied entry to Gaza.

We appeal to all just and peace loving people to support our stand on this issue and the struggle of the Palestinians to live in peace and dignity.

ON BEHALF OF THE TEAM,

MATTHIAS CHANG,

MISSION LEADER,

THE SPIRIT OF RACHEL CORRIE MISSION,

MAY 2011,

EL-ARISH, EGYPT

Press Statement Signed by All 12 Onboard The Spirit of Rachel Corrie

APPENDIX 2 - MATTHIAS CHANG'S LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE OF EGYPT

From: Matthias Chang
To: Prime Minister's Secretary, Prime Minister's Office
Subject: Urgent Letter to His Excellency Dr. Essam Sharaf
Sent: Sunday, 5th June 2011, 11:43 am

Dear Hala Nassar,
Office of the Prime Minister

Please convey to H.E. Prime Minister Dr. Essam Sharaf my grateful appreciation for His Excellency's graceful intervention in ensuring our safe passage to Malaysia.

However, our humanitarian cargo of 7.5km of PVC pipes for Gaza's sewerage system to replace the 7.9km sewage pipes destroyed by Israel during "Operation Cast Lead" remains onboard our Malaysian ship M.V. Finch. The ship is now still stranded outside your El-Arish Port. This would be devastating news for the Palestinians in Gaza.

I appeal to H.E. Dr. Essam Sharaf to ensure the speedy discharge of the cargo in El-Arish, and have the same cargo delivered to the Egyptian Red Crescent for onward delivery to Gaza.

The Egyptian people is a great people and we know that our future co-operation will ensure a new era of friendship and mutual respect.

Allahu akbar.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,
Matthias Chang,
Mission Leader of the Spirit of Rachel Corrie Mission,
Special Advisor to Dr. Mahathir Mohamad

From: Prime Minister's Secretary, Prime Minister's Office
To: Matthias Chang
Subject: Re: Urgent Letter to His Excellency Dr. Essam Sharaf
Sent: Sunday, 5th June 2011, 11:59 am

Dear Mr. Matthias Chang,
Mission Leader of the Spirit of Rachel Corrie Mission,
Special Advisor to Dr. Mahathir Mohamad

On behalf of H.E. Prime Minister Dr. Essam Sharaf, I would like to thank you for the appreciation email, and would like to inform you that we have submitted your request to the responsible Ministry to take necessary actions for the issue discussed.

I appreciate your co-operation and patience towards the matter.

Looking forward for more communication between your beloved country Malaysia and Egypt.

Best Regards,

Hala Nassar
Office of the Prime Minister
Cabinet of Ministers
Egypt
