



Office of Hon Murray McCully

Minister of Foreign Affairs

9 JUN 2011

Harmeet Singh Sooden
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Dear Mr Sooden

I refer to your email and letter of 30 May notifying your intention to join the 'Freedom Flotilla II', which aims to travel to Gaza by sea.

Participation in Freedom Flotilla

The New Zealand government strongly advises against attempts to breach Israel's naval blockade of Gaza, given the risk to those involved, and does not endorse the participation of New Zealand citizens in the flotilla initiative.

The New Zealand government supports the recent statements by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon calling on governments of countries around the Mediterranean to discourage the use of flotillas to deliver assistance to Gaza given their potential to escalate into violent conflict.

The New Zealand government further supports the UN Secretary General's statements that assistance and goods destined to Gaza should be channelled through legitimate crossings and established channels.

The New Zealand government does have a responsibility to its citizens when they are abroad but, as you note, there is no New Zealand diplomatic presence in Gaza and our ability to assist you if you get into trouble would be extremely limited. I understand you have read the government's travel advisory covering Gaza, which advises against all travel due to the extreme risk to personal safety from kidnapping, acts of terrorism and retaliatory military operations.

Furthermore, we suggest you read our advice on Arrest and Detention overseas, in particular, the advice that being a New Zealand citizen does not lead to any special treatment and the New Zealand Government and its officials cannot intervene in the judicial processes of another country. Travelling New Zealanders must comply with the laws of the country they are visiting and should accept personal responsibility by taking all precautions to avoid getting in trouble overseas

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has advised the Israeli Ambassador that New Zealand citizens may be participating in the flotilla and our expectation that, if

New Zealand citizens breach any Israeli laws, or are detained for any reason, they will be treated appropriately in accordance with international obligations.

New Zealand's position on the peace process

New Zealand supports the vision of Israeli-Palestinian peace outlined by President Obama in his recent speech. New Zealand has consistently urged both parties to return to negotiations in good faith to reach a lasting peace settlement, based on a two-state solution in accordance with UNSC resolutions and subsequent agreements between the two parties.

Since the beginning of the Arab – Israeli conflict, New Zealand has sought to take a balanced, even-handed approach to the issue, seeking a solution that provided for a Jewish/Israeli and a Palestinian state on the land of the former British mandate of Palestine. This policy has its origins in our commitment to the 1947 United Nations partition resolution on Palestine and the 1967 UN Security Council resolution on the need for a just settlement and Israel's withdrawal from occupied territory.

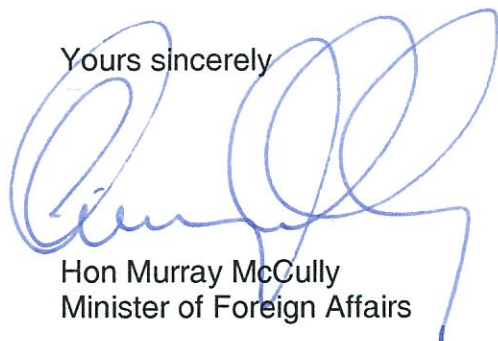
New Zealand is prepared to speak out against actions by any party that are likely to have contravened international law. These include rocket attacks by Hamas and/or other Palestinian militant groups against Israel. Equally, we have spoken out against actions by Israel, including its closure policy in respect of the Gaza Strip, and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

New Zealand's position on the situation in Gaza

New Zealand has consistently called, in the United Nations and bilaterally, on Israel to meet its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law to the Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian territory. New Zealand has welcomed moves by Israel and Egypt to relax restrictions on the flow of humanitarian and other necessary supplies into Gaza, while repeating our calls for these to be eased further. We have also supported this aim by funding the employment of Dr Tim Williams, an access and movements advisor in the Office of the Quartet Representative. At the same time, the Government has called on the Palestinians to dismantle terrorist infrastructure and end rocket attacks.

New Zealand was greatly concerned at the Gaza flotilla incident on 31 May 2010, and is looking forward to the report of the UN Secretary General's Panel of Inquiry, which it hopes will bring greater clarity to the events.

Yours sincerely



Hon Murray McCully
Minister of Foreign Affairs