

30 May 2011

Hon. Murray McCully
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Parliament Office
Private Bag 18888
Parliament Buildings
Wellington
Email: m.mccully@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Minister,

I am writing with regards to the participation of New Zealand citizens including myself in the international initiative, 'Freedom Flotilla II' (FF2), which is increasingly gaining public support in New Zealand.

In accordance with my role as an FF2 participant, I am aware of the personal risks involved in travelling to Gaza by sea. I am familiar with the New Zealand Government's travel advisory covering this region, which advises that there is no New Zealand diplomatic presence in the Gaza Strip. Nevertheless, the Government has the responsibility, indeed the wherewithal, to assist us.

Therefore, it is with some urgency that I request the Government fulfil its perfunctory obligations, namely for you in your capacity as the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

1. To urge Israel's Ambassador to New Zealand, His Excellency Mr Shemi Tzur, to guarantee that New Zealand citizens on board the flotilla vessels will not be harmed and their passage to Gaza will not be impeded by the Israel Defense Forces. You may recall that in 2008 while attempting to travel to the Occupied Palestinian Territory as a human rights defender, I was detained by the Israeli authorities and denied legal representation or access to consular officials, assaulted and removed from Israel. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) concluded that Israel had effectively breached the Vienna Convention on Consular Rights, yet MFAT, during your tenure, failed to take any remedial action.
2. To request that Mr Tzur and Israel respect in good faith the international call for the cessation of Israel's hostilities against the Palestinian population.
3. In view of United States President Barack Obama's recent re-statement of the United States' formal policy that Israel return to its pre-1967 borders, to inform Mr Tzur and the New Zealand public that this is New Zealand's actual policy.

4. In the interests of the security of New Zealand citizens aboard the flotilla vessels, to make a definitive statement to the New Zealand public and myself on the Government's:
 - a. Legal opinion on Israel's status as an 'Occupying Power' in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
 - b. Assessment on the legality of the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of Gaza.
 - c. Assessment, whether preliminary or final, on the legality of Israel's raid on the Gaza flotilla in 2010, which resulted in the deaths of nine civilians, and the raid's aftermath.
 - d. Official position on a settlement to the Israel-Palestine conflict.
5. To become the first nation-state to endorse the participation of its citizens in the FF2 initiative.

I trust you will give the aforementioned requests due consideration and respond as soon as is practicable.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Harmeet Singh Sooden, P.Eng.