

Mr. President.

The Security Council is convened this afternoon following the serious event that took place today early morning local time, when a convoy of six ships attempted to break the maritime blockage off the coast of Gaza. Although portrayed in the media as a humanitarian mission delivering aid to Gaza, this flotilla was nothing but a humanitarian mission. If indeed it were a humanitarian mission it would have accepted, weeks ago, during the planning stages, the offer by the Israeli authorities to transfer the aid, through to the port of Ashdod, to Gaza through the existing overland crossing, in accordance with established procedures. Many states and organizations, including the UN, are using those mechanisms on a daily basis.

The Flotilla organizers not only rejected this offer, but stated clearly that (and I quote) "this mission is not about delivering Humanitarian supply, but rather about breaking the Israeli siege " as Greta Berlin, a flotilla spokesperson told the media last week.

Mr. President.

What kind of Humanitarian activists demand to bypass the United Nations, the Red Cross, and other internationally recognized agencies?

What kind of peace activists use knives, clubs and other weapons to attack soldiers who board a ship in accordance with international law?

What kind of Humanitarian activists, some with known terrorist history, embrace Hamas, a terrorist organization that openly shuns a two state solution and calls for Israel destruction, defying conditions set by the international community and the Quartet. The answer is clear: they are not peace activists; they are not messengers of good will. They cynically use a humanitarian platform to send a message of hate and to implement violence.

Mr. President.

Let me remind the Council that a state of armed conflict exists between Israel and the Hamas terrorist regime controlling Gaza. Let me remind the Council that rockets and mortars are still being launched by Hamas and others toward southern Israel.

Let me remind the council that Gaza is occupied by terrorists that ousted the PA in a violent coup, and that arms are continuously being smuggled, including by sea.

Let me stress that a maritime blockade is a legitimate and recognized measure Under international law that may be implemented as part of an armed conflict at sea. A blockage may be imposed in sea including in international waters. Let me also stress that Israel provided, in due time, not only information about the existence of the blockage, but also appropriate notification to the relevant governments and to the organizers of the Gaza Flotilla. The organizers turned down the repeated offers by Israel to transfer the aid to Gaza, because they had other plans.

Listen to one of the statements made prior to the events by one of the main organizer:

“They [the Israelis] are going to have to forcefully stop us.” Bulent Yildirim, the leader of the IHH, one of the primary organizers of the flotilla, announced just prior to boarding: “we are going to resist and resistance will win.”

Moreover, it should be noted that the organizing group, the IHH has a radical anti-Western orientation. Alongside its legitimate humanitarian activities, it supports radical Islamic networks such as Hamas, and at least in the past has even supported global jihad elements, such as Al-Qaeda.

Mr. President.

Being a so-called humanitarian mission, these champions of human rights also rejected in the initial planning stage an Israeli request to ask Hamas to allow the Red Cross to visit captured soldier Gilad Shalit.

When it became clear that the protest flotilla intended to violate the blockage, despite the repeated warnings, Israeli Naval personnel boarded the vessels and redirected them to Ashdod. Unfortunately, the soldiers boarding one of the ships, were violently attacked with life threatening means; live ammunition, knives, clubs, deck furniture and others types of weaponry were used against IDF soldiers, with a clear intentions to perform, what I would describe, as no less than a lynch. The soldiers undoubtedly acted in self-defense, prompted by the uncontrolled violence attempted at their lives. According to reports, the unfortunate event, resulted in the death and injuries to the protesters as well as grave injuries to our soldiers. The injured were evacuated and are currently treated at Israeli hospitals. The IDF, as part of its standard operating procedures will conduct debriefing on the matter that would shed more light on the occurrences we have witnessed today.

Mr. President.

Let me be very clear, this was not a peaceful protest. The IHH people on board one of the ships were not humanitarian aid activists. The IDF operation began as a preventive measure to counter illegal breakage of the blockage. Any

responsible government would act accordingly in similar circumstances to protect its civilians. It is the responsibility of the organizers, the provocateurs, some linked to terrorist organizations.

The results of last night's events are tragic and unfortunate, and Israel regrets any loss of innocent lives. But it cannot jeopardize its security.

The full picture of the circumstances that lead to these consequences will continue to unfold in the next few days. However it is important, members of the council, colleagues, that while assessing this particular event, we cannot lose grip of the bigger picture. We cannot ignore the threat to peace and security posed by Hamas. We cannot ignore the most basic necessity and obligation of Israel to safeguard its security by appropriate measures when threatened.

On the other hand, let us not get diverted from the need to continue advancing on the political track. While the complicated situation in and around Gaza persists, and today's incident is only an example of it, we should continue to embrace the positive developments from the past few weeks, so that we and the Palestinian Authority can sit together for direct talks for the benefit of our people and the region as a whole.