

Mass protests across Europe after Israeli forces seize Freedom Flotilla boat with aid for Gaza

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The Israeli navy's seizure of the Freedom Flotilla boat *Madleen*, sailing for Gaza, is a brazen act of piracy in defense of the imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza.

In the early hours of Monday morning, Israeli quadcopter drones and warships surrounded the UK-flagged *Madleen*, shooting it with white paint, and illegally boarded it in international waters, seizing everyone aboard and its cargo. Those kidnapped and taken to Israel included Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg and France Unbowed (LFI) legislator Rima Hassan.

The Freedom Flotilla Coalition, which kept contact with the *Madleen* from Catania, Sicily, said the boat was “forcibly intercepted by the Israeli military at 3:02 am CET in international waters at 31.95236°N, 32.38880°E. The ship was unlawfully boarded, its unarmed civilian crew abducted, and its life-saving cargo—including baby formula, food and medical supplies—confiscated.”

The seizure of the *Madleen* is the latest assault on vessels defying the illegal Israeli blockade of Gaza. In 2010, Israeli forces bombed the Turkish aid ship *Mavi Marmara* bound for Gaza, killing 10 people. In May, the Freedom Flotilla vessel *Conscience* was bombed by Israeli drones in international waters off Malta, leaving it burning and forcing its crew to abandon ship.

The assault on the *Madleen* exposes not only the barbarism of the Zionist regime, but the ongoing collusion of the imperialist powers with Israel's genocide in Gaza. Last month the French, British and Canadian governments issued an empty condemnation of the escalating drive to ethnically cleanse Gaza using starvation as a weapon of war. But aside from such rhetoric, nothing has changed.

Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government in the UK continues to supply parts for Israel's F-35 jets that are still bombing Gaza.

The Gaza Freedom Flotilla Coalition had called on Starmer to protect the ship. A statement issued in the early hours of Saturday said: “As a vessel flying the British flag, it falls under the jurisdiction and responsibility of the UK government, which has a legal duty to defend ‘Madleen’ and the civilians on board, and to prevent unlawful interference—including any threat or use of force—by foreign powers such as Israel.”

The coalition called on the government to issue a public warning to Israel that any action against the *Madleen* is “unacceptable and unlawful” and urged the UK to “comply with its legal duties” to “prevent genocide,” including rejecting “the legitimacy of Israel's blockade and actively supporting efforts to deliver humanitarian aid and uphold international law.”

In the aftermath of the vessel's seizure, according to sources who spoke to former UK ambassador Craig Murray, Foreign Secretary David Lammy ordered Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) officials not to have any comments about the *Madleen* checked by the department's legal advisers or by maritime experts, including the Royal Navy.

French diplomats had issued anonymous assurances that France would assist the vessel, with most of those on board being French citizens, telling news site *blast-info*: “France is following with close attention the [*Madleen*] sailboat's situation, as six French citizens are aboard. If needed, we stand ready to assist our citizens.”

On Sunday, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz had threatened the *Madleen*: “I have instructed the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] to act to prevent the ‘Madeleine’ [sic] hate flotilla from reaching the shores of Gaza and to take whatever measures are necessary to that end... To the antisemitic Greta and her fellow Hamas propaganda spokespeople, I say clearly: You should turn back because

you will not reach Gaza. Israel will act against any attempt to break the blockade or to assist terrorist organisations—by sea, by air, and by land.”

Ultimately, France took no action to protect the *Madleen* against the Zionist regime’s illegal military response. Britain sent a spy plane from the nearby Royal Air Force airbase at Akrotiri, Cyprus, that monitored the area while Israeli forces illegally boarded and seized the *Madleen*.

There were 12 people aboard the *Madleen*, including citizens of Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Brazil as well as France. On Monday, three of the *Madleen*’s crew, including Thunberg, agreed to be deported from Israel and were expelled to their native countries. Eight, including Hassan, refused to sign deportation papers and are still detained in Israel, pending deportation orders from an Israeli judge.

All had refused Katz’ demands that they watch propaganda material on the October 7, 2023, “al Aqsa Flood” uprising against the illegal Gaza blockade, which Israel still cites as justification for genocide.

As mass outrage mounts across Europe, protests were held internationally after the Israeli seizure of the *Madleen*. In Switzerland, protesters marched in Geneva and Lausanne, occupying train stations and blocking traffic by standing on railroad tracks. There were protests in Britain and in Spain, whose government—though it has shipped millions of euros in arms to Israel during the genocide—called in the Israeli *chargé d’affaires* to the Spanish Foreign Ministry and cynically delivered a formal letter of protest.

In France, where Marseille dock workers refused to load a shipment of arms bound for Israel shortly before Israel seized the *Madleen*, LFI organized protests in several dozen cities that won mass support in Paris, calling for the release of the *Madleen*’s crew and appealing to Macron to take action.

The latest Israeli act of barbarism confirms that workers and youth cannot stop the Gaza genocide with moral appeals to European imperialist governments who are all complicit in war crimes. What is required is the construction of an international movement in the working class, among the rank and file, to halt the shipping of arms to the genocide and to mobilize workers of all ethnicities in the Middle East—including Jewish, Arab, Iranian, Turkish, and Kurdish—against the genocide.

WSWS reporters in France intervened in the protests in Paris and interviewed demonstrators. Jordan, a civil servant from Marseille, told the WSWS: “There is so

much injustice in the illegal occupation of Palestinian land, and the silence of our government outrages us. Knowing that ships bringing humanitarian aid were illegally intercepted in international waters by the Israeli military outrages us even more. ... The action of dockworkers at the Fos port [in Marseille] is entirely legitimate.”

Cyrine told the WSWS that the Israeli attack on the *Madleen* and the broader assault on Gaza “is not vengeance for what happened on October 7. This is a pretext to put into action their pre-existing plan, which calls for the extermination of the Palestinian people. ... And France is doing nothing. Every time something happens, Macron comes out with a communiqué.” However, Cyrine added, “Last year, he issued an invitation to Netanyahu. That shows what side France really is on. Now he’s crying a little bit because people are angry in France.”

Carla, a youth from Latin America, told WSWS reporters: “I’m here because I’m angry. I’m young, I must look to my future, but I can see no future if there is a genocide that is truly happening now. As we speak, there are people without access to water or food, who are being killed. And what for? It is for the advantage of big companies, those in power. I ask myself: what do you want for the next five years? I want to fight for a better future, a future that I truly want.”

Carla said she supported the action by dock workers in Marseille and in other ports internationally to halt the genocide. “Workers, as you said, in the weapons factories, dockers in Marseille and Belgium and elsewhere, if they are united, they could stop everything.” Carla added that people must “stop saying that capitalism is the only possibility, that we cannot exist without capitalism. Collective action has always been there. That is how we have made progress.”



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