



– FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –

Eyewitness accounts of the Israel commando's assault on the Gaza-bound humanitarian flotilla

Montreal, June 8, 2010 – One week after Israel's bloody raid on an aid flotilla heading for Gaza, the accounts of activists on the flotilla continue to emerge and present a very different version of what happened on the morning of May 31. The Israeli government's allegation that a group of "violent thugs" had planned an assault on Israeli soldiers is refuted by all of the eyewitnesses. The latter report that, on the contrary, Israeli forces resorted to deadly force almost immediately, and did so against people who did not pose any immediate threat to them.

Jamal Elshayyal, a journalist for *Al Jazeera*'s English service, was aboard the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara* during the assault. He confirms that the Israeli commandos fired upon the passengers before even setting foot on the ship: "What I saw were shots being fired from the helicopter above, and moments later from below – from the ships. As far as I am concerned, it's a lie to say they only started shooting on deck." A man beside him was shot through the top of his head and died instantly.

Autopsies on the bodies of the nine victims, all of whom were Turkish, confirmed that several were shot multiple times at point blank range. One of the victims was a journalist taking photos. "A man was shot [...] between the eyebrows, which indicates that it wasn't an attack that took place in self-defence," stated Hassan Ghani, one of the *Mavi Marmara* passengers, during an interview. Mattias Gardell, a Swedish activist, asserted, "The soldier had the time to prepare his shot. The Israelis committed pre-meditated murder [...] Two people were killed by shots in the forehead, one was shot in the back of the head and one in the chest."

"It's becoming ever clearer that Israel behaved rashly and recklessly during this event," said Thomas Woodley, president of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME). "The Israeli commandos were not appropriately trained for this mission. Faced with their inability to immediately subdue the civilians on board the *Mavi Marmara*, they considered no other option than to open fire on crudely armed civilians," he added.

CJPME is also alarmed by the mounting evidence that Israel has systematically suppressed a large part of the photographic material after confiscating it from the passengers and journalists. Even more worrisome is the use of this material by Israel authorities to concoct their own version of the facts. "This is shocking disregard for the rights of journalists," said Aidan White, General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists. The confiscation and then unauthorized use of journalists' footage shows the contempt that the Israeli authorities have for journalism."

Israel announced Sunday that it objected to the establishment of an independent international commission by the United Nations—one that would include representatives of the United States, Israel and Turkey—to investigate the raid.

About CJPME – *Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is a non-profit and secular organization bringing together men and women of all backgrounds who labour to see justice and peace take root again in the Middle East. Its mission is to empower decision-makers to view all sides with fairness and to promote the equitable and sustainable development of the region.*

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