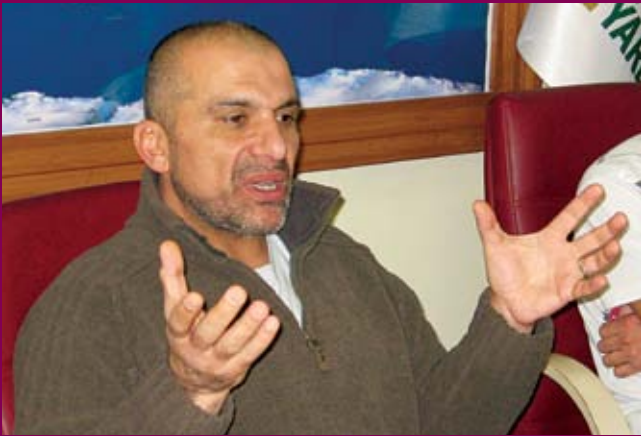


**I NEITHER WANT THE APOLOGY
NOR THE MONEY OF ISRAEL,
BUT ONLY REAL JUSTICE!**

Ahsan Shamruk

27 December 2010 / Istanbul, Turkey



Ahsan Shamruk (1964) is a Palestinian (“Israeli Arab”) who lives in London for the last twenty-five years. His family still lives in Ramlah which is under the Israeli occupation since 1948. He is self-employed in London, and has two children. He was shot twice, one on the head and one on the belly, and beaten several times on the *Mavi Marmara* by the Israeli soldiers.

Why did you join the Gaza Freedom Flotilla? What was your motivation?

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. The Israelis have always been disproportionately more powerful, and a true force of racial oppressors, inflicting brutal force whenever and wherever they want. On the other hand, the Gazans are the oppressed, the victims of Israelis' ongoing slaughter and murder... When the IHH wanted to help the oppressed people of Gaza and to give them back their freedom, honour and hope, this also gave me a hope and a strong motivation. A mutual trust instilled between us that we could accomplish our mission to break the siege and stop all the bloodshed.

Did you expect an Israeli attack before setting off? As you know, the Israeli authorities state that they warned in advance that they would not allow the Flotilla to go through.

Yes, I did; but the maximum they would do, I thought, was to stop us or make it harder for us to go to Gaza or direct the ship maybe to al-Arish in Egypt. I think Israelis were not expecting the passengers of the *Mavi Marmara* to be so united and engage in self-defence. So they panicked and started shooting right at the beginning before boarding the ship.

How was the atmosphere on the *Mavi Marmara* before the attack?

The atmosphere was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in my life. I was born and raised in Israel among the Jews, and witnessed the Arabs and the Muslim nations that were all separated from each other. But *subhan'Allah* (glory be to God) on the ship, we were so united. There were hundreds of brothers and sisters from about forty countries. We were very happy as if we were going to a party or a wedding. It was so beautiful like a bird in the sky. I didn't have a similar feeling ever in my life. I felt what freedom means. I felt very safe, because I knew that if something happens, I got brothers that would really do something to protect me. It was a great pleasure to be on the *Mavi Marmara*.

Even the priest [Archbishop Hilarion Capucci] on the *Mavi Marmara* sat and started praying with us while we were praying – I think it was the *isha'a salah* (evening prayer) – although he is not a Muslim. All what you could hear were praying and *nasheed* (hymns). At that moment, I felt as if I was in heaven on the *Mavi Marmara*.

Could you please tell us what happened during the Israeli attack? How was the atmosphere? I would like to learn your personal experiences and what you witnessed.

I remember the explosions started while we were praying *fajr salah* (dawn prayer). Some of the brothers started to warn us saying, "Israel is attacking, Israel is attacking," while we were still in the middle of the prayer. As soon as we finished the prayer, I put my shoes on and looked at the sea. I saw there were boats, and soldiers that were shooting at us. I went to the upper deck. I stood with Hassan Ghani, the correspondent of *PressTV*, and he asked me to hold his camera as he had to bring his telephone. As he left, I held his camera and started filming. As soon as he came back, I saw two helicopters above us, one with a projector and the other with ropes where the "well-trained elite(!)" Israeli commandos were coming down. (By the way, the Israeli army referred to them as "elite soldiers" so as to scare us not to dare go to Gaza; in fact they were really the biggest cowards hiding behind their guns!) Immediately I run to the top deck and participated in the resistance against the Israeli soldiers. We did our best to defend the ship *alhamdulillah* (praise be to God). Actually we had the opportunity to take their guns, retaliate and shoot them and their helicopters, but we were there for only one reason: to help and give the people of Gaza a reason to live, not only to bear a shameful existence...

They should have seen me from the helicopter while fighting their soldiers, so they shot me in the head. I got a bullet in my head coming through my mouth by ripping my lips. Another soldier who was already down shot me in my belly. Four soldiers jumped on me, put me on the floor, tied my hand with plastic cable ties and started kicking me. As I was born and raised in Israel, and can speak and write Hebrew very well, I could understand what the soldiers were talking to each other. One of the soldiers who was kicking me said, "He is the leader, kill him!" So it was like an opportunity for those soldiers who got permission to kill me. After they finished kicking – by the way they were real kicks, with the boots of soldiers – they left me on the floor for about two hours. I was bleeding all over. When they came back two hours later and saw that I was still moving, one of the soldiers said to the other, "Look at that (...), he is still alive!" They asked me to stand up, and I stood up. They took me to the front of the boat and asked me to lie down again, but I refused. I was already wounded, what else could they do?

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Whilst I was being kicked and beaten, I felt no pain at all, none whatsoever; because my mind was only speaking to Allah, praying constantly. I felt that I was in my final moments of my life, so I began to say the *shahadah* (the Muslim declaration of belief) when I was lying on the floor of the *Mavi Marmara*.

When I sat, there was another Turkish brother in front of me who was really seriously wounded. He was lying down and shouting “*Allaho Akbar, Allaho Akbar!* (God is the greatest, God is the greatest!)” They didn’t like it. They asked me to move somewhere else where another Turkish brother was sitting in front of me bleeding all over his face.

I cannot remember the exact timing but become like daylight when they brought a stretcher and put me on it. They didn’t carry me but just dragged me up to under the helicopter. They threw a rope from the helicopter. The soldier tied the stretcher to himself and took me to the helicopter. The mental abuse I suffered at the hands of the soldiers in the helicopter precedes everything that happened to me, since they took all my clothes off. I was stripped naked and made to lie on the floor in front of the soldiers, forced into being defenceless, all the while I was begging Allah to forgive me for being naked... Furthermore, in the helicopter one soldier kicked me twice on the head with his boots.

Till that time they didn’t know where I was from. I believe they thought I was a Turk, so that they gave me a good beating and kicked me on the head both on the ship and in the helicopter.

Is it because they thought you are a Turk, or because you are an Arab and a Palestinian?

No, they didn’t know that I am an Arab. They thought I am a Turk. If they knew that I can speak Hebrew, then they would not say one to the other, “Kill him, he is the leader” or “Look at that (...), he is still alive!” When they took me to hospital, they asked me straight away where I was from; I said, “I am from Israel.” As soon as

THE BULLET FIRED FROM THE HELICOPTER SHOT ME IN THE HEAD, WENT THROUGH MY MOUTH RIPPING MY LIPS. ANOTHER SOLDIER ON BOARD SHOT ME IN MY BELLY. FOUR SOLDIERS JUMPED ON ME AND STARTED KICKING. HOWEVER, THE MENTAL ABUSE I SUFFERED IN THE HELICOPTER PRECEDES EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED TO ME.

they knew that I am from Israel, they stopped speaking to each other in Hebrew. They were very careful not to speak Hebrew in front of me since they didn't want me to understand what they were talking. Even when anybody came to say something to them, they warned that I spoke Hebrew.

Then you were taken to a hospital. What happened there and also in Israel?

In the hospital they took me to another room and left me there bleeding for about twelve hours. After that they took me to the operating room, and one of the doctors said, "It has been twelve hours, now we have to start stitching." After they finished stitching and all other things, I was back to the room. I think I stayed there for a few days. In the room, a Turkish brother, Murat, was lying next to me. I saw how the Israelis were laughing at him. He was in real pain and coughing blood. It was not surprising, Allah wanted me to be next to him; because straight away next to me, there was a plastic bag, and I gave it to him whenever he was coughing blood. When he said that he wanted to go toilet, I helped him by giving what he needed. Next to me there was tissue, I gave it whenever he wanted... I think all these were from Allah.

Shortly after, I could walk like nothing happened to me, I only had bruises. They put chain in my legs and put me in handcuffs. What they thought we were, I don't know, but we got soldiers with machine guns waiting on us non-stop for twenty-four hours in hospital...

Then they took me from hospital to the Ramleh Prison where there were prisoners being judged for thirty, forty, fifty or sixty years from all over the Arab world. I think I stayed in prison for about two days, and then they took me to the airport. I supposed to come back to Turkey with the brothers, but they didn't let me and said, "You're an Israeli, so you're not allowed to go with them." I remember one brother called İbrahim, with whom we were sitting together, said to the Israelis, "Here I have ten thousand dollars in my pocket. I'll give



you, but let brother Ahsan come with us.” They said, “No, he is staying here.” They came with a form and said to me, “If you wanna go with them, you have to sign this form that you’re not to be allowed to come back here again.” I said, “No! I won’t sign anything. If you wanna keep me, then keep me.” They said, “If you stay, you’re going back to jail,” and I said, “Okay, take me back to jail.” After that they came and said, “Look, we are going to Beersheba, and your parents’ town will be on our way. We can drop you at your parents.” I thought that they were trying to threaten me. I said, “Okay, take me to my parents.” My parents’ house was in the middle of the way, two kilometres away from the airport. On the way from airport they were mouthing me, “You’re stupid! What are you doing? Why do you need to do all that? You live in London like a king, and all the good life...” I asked to the policeman, “Am I free? Am I free to go?”; they said to me, “Yeah.” I said, “Well, stop the car then, I wanna go.” They stopped the car and let me go. With my pyjamas and slippers on, I walked to my parents’ house. While walking, I saw a friend who didn’t recognize me. I said to him, “Jihad, its Ahsan,” he was surprised and said, “What’s happened?” I mentioned to him about the *Mavi Marmara* that he already knew about it. He dropped me at my parents’ house.

When I went to my parents’ house and opened the door, my mum saw me. I was looking at my mum, and she was looking at me. I was like a stranger to her; she didn’t know who that was. I said, “Mummy, this is Ahsan,” and she kept looking at me. I don’t know if she was in a shock or didn’t really recognize me. Luckily my sister was there, but when she came and looked at me, she fainted and fell on the floor. After that, my father who was sitting in the corner came and started crying. Then my mum regained consciousness and

WHEN WE WERE PRAYING SALAH, EVEN THE ARCHBISHOP HILARION CAPUCCI SAT AND STARTED PRAYING WITH US. ALL WHAT YOU COULD HEAR AT THAT MOMENT WAS PRAYING AND NASHEED. I FELT AS IF I WAS IN HEAVEN ON THE MAVI MARMARA.

started hugging me asking, “What’s happened? What’s happened? Who’s done this to you?” I said, “I was on the *Mavi Marmara*.”

I suppose your parents didn’t know that you joined the Flotilla, did they?

No, they didn’t know anything about it. Because I joined two land convoys to Gaza before, and the Egyptian security severely beat me up in both convoys. While attacking us in al-Arish, they used tear gas, water cannon, bricks, stones and whatever they had. At one time they beat me on the head, and the next, they broke my ribs by beating me on the chest using sticks. So my parents were worried, and didn’t want me to join another convoy. Actually it’s not they didn’t want, but you know, they are parents. I mean I can be a hundred years old, but I am still their little child!.. When I told them what happened on the *Mavi Marmara*, and how the Israelis shot and beat me up, my mother calmed down and started to kiss me saying, “*Masha’Allah* (God has willed it), you’re on the *Mavi Marmara*! *Al-hamdulillah* you’ve done what you have to do.”

I stayed with my parents for about two weeks, and when I was watching the Israeli televisions, I saw footage of me. Every day on two Israeli channels, they were broadcasting footage of me saying, “I wanna die *shaheed* (martyr), I wanna die *shaheed*.” I know they were going to kill me there if I stayed more. So I had to buy the airplane tickets and went to the British embassy. They gave me an emergency passport since Israelis stole everything we had. Then I returned to London... Now I am in Turkey working for the preparations of the Freedom Flotilla II. Next time, I want to get on board the *Mavi Marmara* again, and go to Gaza with my family – my wife and two children, seven and nine years old – *insha’Allah* (if God wills).

Do you think the Freedom Flotilla was successful, and achieved its goals? Because some people think that nothing was achieved, and many people were killed and wounded in vain. What are the most important achievements of this Flotilla?



Archbishop Hilarion Capucci and Ahsan Shamruk on the Mavi Marmara

It was very successful, really very very successful. It united many Muslims in the world. On top of that, lots of people were thinking the Israelis as innocent angels, the chosen people by God on this earth. With the *Mavi Marmara* massacre, many people all over the world find out that those people are murderers and killers. Many people open their eyes about what is happening in Gaza, what is happening to the Palestinian people. Take the boat with medical aids, cement, building materials, etc.; little worth dying for really, but Israel killed nine and wounded over fifty people just for that... So, yes, it was very very successful, and I'm sure it's gonna break the siege *insha'Allah*.

If you know that you are doing something for good, e.g. you are trying to give people a better life or trying to give a life to people, Allah helps you. Just imagine a woman giving birth, and there is no milk or no medicine to give her baby; what can this mother do? So, yes, for this reason, I want to go to Gaza again and again and again. I have to help those people in Gaza, because they need me. The only embarrassing thing is that the Arab countries are not sufficiently doing what they have to do. Enough is enough. We'll have to do it.

Are you hopeful of the ongoing international legal proceedings?

Israel may apologise and may give some money as compensation,

but I neither want their apology nor their money. I don't accept their apology and compensation at all; because it's not the first time they did it, and sadly will not be the last one. An apology means nothing to them. I want justice, real justice. If there is a justice, yes, I will be happy. On the other hand, I know that they may apologise and give money, but they will do it again and again. In 1948, they killed my grandfather, his brother and his nephew in their village of Zakariah (which is under occupation, and now where only Jews live) by lining them up and shooting. My father, though hidden away, witnessed clearly what was happening. In Ramadan of 1994, they killed my uncle and cousins during the massacre in al-Ibrahimi Mosque when one Jewish settler went into the mosque with a machine gun during the *fajr* prayer. The murderer was a doctor in Hebron, and became the hero for the Jewish people because he killed tens of Palestinians... The Rabbi Ovadia Yosef says, "Don't sell to them, don't trade with them..." According to them it is against the law/*shariah* to sell or rent anything to the Arabs. Or they made another Bible saying, "You are allowed to kill anyone if he is an Arab; you are allowed to kill a pregnant woman because, she is carrying a terrorist..." They don't believe in anything, they are not really human. So what if they apologise? What if they give compensation? It means nothing to me. They won't bring the *shaheeds* back!

By the way, the funniest thing is that when I went to a hospital in Ramat Gan which was a new hospital, very posh and with the latest technology, I was told that it was built with the Saudi money, and that Saudi rich men donated it for the Israeli children. The soldiers told me, "Why are you doing all that noise? Your Saudis paid for the most of the hospital." I went back and asked my elder brother whether that was true or not. He replied, "Yes, it was all over the papers; the Saudi men built that hospital for the Jews." So what chance we have?

What I'm saying is that when I saw the *Mavi Marmara* and all the people that were united, I said, "*Alhamdulillah*, there is a hope that we're going to be united; we are going to make it." *Insha'Allah*, the suffering of those people in Gaza, in Palestine will be stopped, and the siege will be broken if we are united and carry on another *Mavi Marmara* again and again.

What does the *Mavi Marmara* mean to you?

It means hope. It means life. It means dream that came true.