

**WE ARE PROUD OF THE TURKISH BROTHERS
AND THE TURKISH PRIME MINISTER**

Baboo Adem Zanghar

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Baboo Adem Zanghar (1966) lives in Bolton, the United Kingdom, with his family since 1984. He is originally an Indian, from the state of Gujarat and village of Zanghar. He is a merchant, and does voluntary charity and community works in his free time.

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

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. When the Israeli massacre took place in Gaza as of 27 December 2008, which really touched our hearts, we wanted to do something to help for the freedom of Palestine and to help the humanity around the world wherever in need. So I joined two road convoys to Gaza: One set off on 14 February 2009 (Valentine to Palestine Convoy) from the United Kingdom, and the other one was in December 2009 (Life-line 3) which set off from Europe driving through the Middle East. While we were passing through Turkey in the second road convoy, brothers from the IHH joined the convoy, and it felt like a family reunion. I don't have a word to explain how happy we were. So getting to know them from previous convoy and trusting them, we joined the Freedom Flotilla to help the people of Gaza.

Did you foresee 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.

I spoke to few of my friends and especially to my daughter on the day we left Antalya. I said to my daughter on the phone, "Israel can do anything to frustrate us and to prevent any other journey to Gaza. They may block our way and stop us; they may attack and put us into prison. If we don't come back and be martyrs, be proud of us because, you know, we set sail for a good cause. We're taking basic humanitarian needs to Gaza. If they send us to prison, then make more *dua* (pray, supplication) so that Allah gives us strength and patience." *Alhamdulillah* (praise be to God) despite whatever happened, we are still very happy, and determined to go again and again until the siege of Gaza be lifted.

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

Well, when the journey started, it was my privilege to work with the brothers of IHH as a volunteer on the ship. I found everybody on board like my real loved ones, my own family. So I was very happy for working around. All the ships of the Flotilla were like birds flying and saying beautiful hymn... There were Muslims, Christians, Jews and atheists on the ship. Allah united all of us together; we were just like one body. Just imagine there were one-year-old child and eighty-nine-year-old archbishop. It was very nice.

When the Israelis attacked us, there was no fear on anybody's face. Everybody was very calm and looking after each other like one body. We stayed in very good spirits, good strength and unity. When I went back home, I was asked by the media, "Weren't you afraid for your life?" I said, "Not only myself, but all those people on board the ship, nobody feared for their lives." Everybody had a strong feeling that if anything happened to anyone, we were gonna look after each other, and especially the Turkish brothers and the Turkish government would surely cover us. And *alhamdulillah* they did. We are so proud of the Turkish brothers, and especially of the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. When we were all stuck inside the prison, Israel tried to send individuals out, but not everybody. Mr. Erdoğan said, "I want each and every person back on the Turkish soil." I am really very proud of him, and salute his strength and courage.

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.

When the attack took place at *fajr* time (dawn), we were aware of what the Israelis were planning to do. Because earlier that night, at around 22:30-23:00, a helicopter was flying overhead, firing shots in the air to make everybody panic and then disappeared. So everybody put a lifejacket on; we made the media aware of us, phoned our friends whoever we could and told them to keep an eye on the news about what's happening. After that we did teamwork with our Turkish brothers, and everybody was distributed to different parts of the ship in order to stop the Israelis coming onto the *Mavi Marmara*. Israelis waited until *fajr adhan* (call to prayer) for everybody start the prayer in order to launch an attack by helicopters. I came upstairs with my slippers after performing *wudu* (ablution) for the *fajr* prayer. One of the brothers called me and said, "Brother, just go and put your trainers back on." So I run downstairs, put my trainers back on, and came back up.

As soon as I stepped out, I saw the first brother – who was shot by gunfire from the helicopter – while being carried down. Another brother, Cevdet [Kılıçlar], was in front of me, and had still a camera in his hand. I think within five minutes or so his body was brought down. I was completely shocked; just a few minutes ago he was in front of me! We were trying to stop the soldiers on zodiac boats climbing onto our ship from the sides... We had lots of brothers wounded, and tried

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to bring them down. We tried to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to one wounded brother who was in front of me.

At one time, one of the Turkish brothers grabbed my collar and pulled me from the back, because an Israeli soldier was targeting with a laser-guided weapon from the helicopter. It was just a matter of split second when he pulled me from the back, and instantly bullets came down. *Alhamdulillah* that brother was there and saved my life.

One Turkish sister's husband, Çetin Topçuoğlu, was killed. She [Çiğdem Topçuoğlu] was in front of me, but I couldn't even look at her, since I was just helpless there. But *masha'Allah* (God has willed it) she was very brave, very very brave. On the other hand, I saw the fear of death in the eyes of Israeli soldiers that we captured, it was unbelievable. I said to myself, "You guys are here with the machine guns and with all weapons of latest technological while we don't have anything. But, *subhan'Allah* (glory be to God), my sisters are much braver than these cowards!" We could kill the soldiers if we wanted to, but we are not terrorists as they are. We weren't there to kill anybody; we were just taking humanitarian aid for the needy people in Gaza and Palestine.

All the sisters were very brave and remained calm. When the ship was totally surrendered, one of the brothers who could read and write Hebrew wrote down a big banner that "We need medical assistance," and one of the sisters just walked towards the soldiers carrying the banner. But one of the soldiers just pointed his laser-guided weapon at her and said, "Walk back, otherwise you'll get shot." So she had to walk back.

Nobody knew what would happen next. Only we could see from inside that the helicopters were waiting outside. While everyone was coming out to the outer deck one by one, one soldier shouted at me, "Oh you, come here!" I just ignored and carried on. He said, "I'm gonna speak once, second time my gun is going to talk!" One of the Turkish brothers, Mustafa [Cengiz Ahmet], who speaks three



Murat Akinan and Baboo Zanghar at the spot where İbrahim Bilgen fell martyr on the Mavi Marmara

languages – I think English, Arabic and Greek – asked him, “What if somebody don’t understand your language?” The soldier said, “Do you speak Arabic, Turkish or English? You get here!” So he called him over, and brother Mustafa went as volunteer to help them for the language barrier. They searched him, but he didn’t have anything except for a t-shirt and three quarter pants, nothing more. He was helping them for translation. Then the Israelis led the dog on him, and the dog bit his belly button and properly mauled him. This was a shock. Israeli soldier said, “The dog was trained, and in case of any danger to them, it attacks.” But brother Mustafa was very strong, he remained calm.

When I was made to go outside, I had medical scissors in my pocket, which we used while cutting the wounded brothers’ clothes. The soldiers, first of all, took the scarf on my neck that had Palestinian flag, and threw it into the sea. Then they found the scissors in my pocket, and one of them just slapped on my face. I don’t know how but I laughed. Another one pushed me, and I was still laughing. One by one, they took off three mobile phones of me. I had Ahsan [Shamruk]’s camcorder on my neck. (By the way, we were always standing together with Ahsan on the ship, and it was the first time we split. So I tried to carry whatever I could from his belongings with me.) When they took the camcorder, the soldier behind me strangled me with the camcorder’s neck string, and tied my hands at the back. Another soldier kicked me on the side and got me on the floor, and four of them started kicking me. Then one of the soldiers held me from collar and dragged me upstairs.

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When I went upstairs, I just said “*subhan’Allah*,” because everybody was sitting on a kneeling down position. We all had to sit in the same position for about six to seven hours. If somebody tried to stand up, they hit him from the back. There was another Turkish brother [Ümit Sönmez] who looked very healthy; his hands were tied so tightly that all his arms went completely green because of no blood circulation. We practically begged them to make it loose, but they completely ignored us.

About noon time, they took us downstairs after searching all the area. An old Turkish man who was called Baba [Özkan Tunaboylu] was sitting in front of me, and stood up to pray *dhuhr salah* (noon prayer). One of the soldiers came and pushed him down. He stood up again and started praying. He did very well, *masha’Allah* he was very brave. By the way, he was wounded both on the *Mavi Marmara* and in the land convoy (Lifeline 3) in December 2009. Allah blessed him in the beginning of Ramadan, in early hours of morning, for the last moment of his life. May Allah grant him Heaven.

We were trying to go to toilet, but they refused everybody. We kept insisting. I stood up a few times, but they pushed me. Later, when I was going towards the toilet, a soldier looked up my passport and asked, “Are you a Turk?” I said, “No, I’m not.” He said, “No, you look like a Turk.” I said, “I’m not a Turk, but if you call me Turk, then okay I’m a Turk.” When I came out of the toilet, they just tied my hands back again and made me kneel down.

When I asked for water on the ship, one of the soldiers said, “You wanna drink my urine?” I said, “No, thank you very much,” in a sarcastic tone. Actually water was just there.

While some commandos were coming down the stairs, a big guy landed on his back side since his foot slipped. Because the hall was like an emergency unit, and there was blood everywhere. I laughed him, and just said, “*Subhan’Allah*.” I said to the other soldier, “See! Every dog has his day. What goes around comes around.” What you did to us, this is what you’re getting back!



Baboo Zanghar in front of a cargo ship (Defne) of the Freedom Flotilla

Then you were all taken to Ashdod Port. What happened there? Do you have similar stories about the abuse and misbehaviour of the Israelis?

When we got to Ashdod Port, we were lined up on the stairs. One of the brothers [Abdulhalim Almali], whose arm was broken, had only a t-shirt and all his clothes were ripped up. They pulled up the string which was supporting his broken arm, and made him scream. It was just unbelievable... When we came out of the ship, there were eighteen or nineteen years old kids around us. First of all, they told all of us, "If you sign this piece of paper, you will be free to go," and I refused to sign anything, because the paper was in Hebrew and I don't understand it. Then they took me into a small tent, did full strip-search on me, and interrogated for nearly an hour. They questioned me about how I raised the money, why I joined the IHH, etc. and I explained. Afterwards, they did two more strip-searches, completely strip-searches on me. They took our photos, finger prints and eye ball pictures against our will.

Then they took me to a prison van which was normally for about seven or nine people, but we were thirteen people inside, and the van was very hot and sweaty. We arrived at prison after over two hours long drive. But *alhamdulillah* we were happy, not regretful at all. We spent a few days in prison. Wherever we went, there were just small boys with big toys. I was just surprised why they were so much worried all the time despite they had all the weapons and other things. It was just unbelievable. We were in custody, and didn't have anything to harm them, but still they feared for their lives!

What about the way back to Turkey?

When we came to the airport, the same frustration... They weren't letting us go to toilet. They again asked for us to sign the paper saying, "If you sign this paper, you can go; if not, then you are not going." We said, "We told you before, we are not signing anything." Then I just had an idea in my mind, and said, "Okay, I'll sign, give it to me." When he gave me the paper, I just wrote down "We have been kidnapped." He looked at it, and said, "Here is your passport, go." I said to myself, "How stupid you are!"; because he thought I signed it, although I just wrote there "We have been kidnapped."

But what I'm really proud of was that when we got into the buses, and saw the six Turkish Airlines' aircrafts – three passenger and three ambulance aircrafts – it was really amazing. Brothers from the IHH, the Turkish brothers and the whole world united. We're proud of them. We're just praying that Allah reunites everyone like this in Heaven, and gives all the humans, all the mankind *hidayath* (the sense of what is right and what is wrong).

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?

It was very very successful. We did achieve our goals even if we couldn't go to Gaza or we couldn't make it to the Land of Palestine. We know that's a big loss for the families of those nine brothers who got killed, but Allah says in *Surah al-Ali Imran*, 169: "And reckon not those who are killed in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive (and) are provided sustenance from their Lord." Also those brothers who were seriously wounded are *ghazees* (veterans). So their blood was not shed in vain.

What really touches my heart about Palestine and Israel is that when I was in my junior school, every time my history teacher mentioned Israel he said, "Israel is only that small, but keeping everybody on its fingertips." I was about eleven or twelve years old, and had many questions in my mind. When I got to the United Kingdom, I came across a small personal video about ten minutes long that I have still got it: Israeli soldiers taking two or three years old small boys from their mothers' hands. That video really touched my heart. Also I've got a collection of videos about what Israel did in Palestine in 1948 and 1967, in Lebanon in 1982 and 2006. Every time they carried on bombing...

I had been to the Masjid al-Aqsa in al-Quds [Jerusalem], and seen there really the fear and the destruction of what the Israelis have been doing. I can't exactly remember the place but one sister was expecting a baby. She could deliver her baby in any minute, but Israelis stopped her from getting medical assistance. We were about there, and called the ambulance. When the ambulance came, they didn't let the ambulance to come closer to her. They said, "No, she has got to walk." She could hardly stand up, so we tried to lift her up to the ambulance; but they just pointed the guns and said, "You, don't move from here." Seeing and keeping in mind all these cruelties, who do you think the real terrorist is? Of course Israel is the real terrorist, and has been fully supported by the Western governments, especially the American. In short, I just wanna state that whatever happened on the Flotilla, happened for a worthwhile cause, *alhamdulillah*. According to what Allah says in the Qur'an, you will get upset, you will get frustrated time up to incident, but if you remain patient, you will see the happiness in the end. So we will see the happiness and success of the Flotilla altogether, *insha'Allah* (if God wills).

What does the *Mavi Marmara* mean to you?

No word for it! When the ship was taken away from us, we felt as if our loved one passed away. When I went back home, for a good two months I couldn't sleep; I was just having nightmares day after day, night after night. Every time I was free, I just came to computer for watching repeatedly all what had happened on the *Mavi Marmara*. So the Israelis can take everything away from us, but a memory, a beautiful memory cannot be taken away.

Actually the *Mavi Marmara* is our princess, and its passengers are our family. We're proud of it. Yesterday [26 December 2010] when we were there on the ship, we didn't want to go back to our homes, we wanted to sail towards Gaza for the freedom of humanity.

There was nothing, no threats to the Israelis on the *Mavi Marmara*, but what they did was very strange. We had seven café on the ship – by the way it was my privilege to work in the café – and naturally we had knives and other necessary materials, just like in any other ship. The Israelis gathered all of them on a side, and showed them to the world as if we carried weapons. Come on, get a life!

But I think the Israelis and all the Zionists are running out of the ideas to humiliate or to blame Muslim. They are running out of the ideas. It is like the beginning of an end to their endless aggression *insha'Allah*.