

**I WITNESSED THE MASSACRE OF THE
ZIONISTS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY VILLAGE,
AL-DAWAYIMA, IN 1948**

Ismail Ali Nashwan

17 March 2011/ Jordan



Hadji Ismail Ali Nashwan (1929) was born in the village of al-Dawayima, located on the west of Hebron, in Palestine. In 1948, in a raid on al-Dawayima, the Zionist 89th Battalion – composed of the Haganah and Lehi organizations – under the command of Moshe Dayan, occupied the village and killed over 400 of its residents. Hadji Ismail Ali Nashwan is one of the eyewitnesses to this massacre. Then the Zionist Occupation Forces exiled those residents that remained alive.... In 1956, he was arrested by the Israeli forces and spent two years in prison, then exiled from Palestine to Jordan. He has been living in Jordan since then.

While dreaming of returning to his homeland, he has made use of every opportunity to go back to Palestine. He joined the Lifeline 3 convoy and the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. In October 2010, he also joined the Lifeline 5 convoy, but the Egyptian administration prevented him from entering Gaza on the grounds that he posed a threat to the national security of Egypt, and that he had also a Turkish citizenship(!).

**THE FREEDOM FLOTILLA ACHIEVED
MUCH GREATER GOALS
THAN ANTICIPATED**

Mustafa Ismail Nashwan

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Mustafa Ismail Nashwan (1969), the son of Hadji Ismail Ali Nashwan, was born in Amman, and completed his education there. Since 1990, he has been working as an imam and a preacher. He joined the Lifeline 3 convoy and the Gaza Freedom Flotilla with his father, and was refused entry to Egypt as part of the Lifeline 5 convoy.

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

Hadji Ismail Ali: I have experienced all phases of the Palestinian cause. I have lived through all the efforts carried out against the occupation such as the wars, the *intifadas* (uprisings) and so on. Thus, it would be unthinkable for me to miss this outstanding international opportunity that Allah granted me.

Mustafa Ismail: My venerable father, and also our respected elders and teachers have inculcated us with the idea that the Palestinian cause is the most fundamental cause of the *ummah* (the Muslim nations). I know that Zionism is one of the roots of the oppression in the world. Thus, when such an opportunity presented itself to me, I thought I certainly had to take part. In addition, the fact that my father was to participate in the Flotilla was a major motivation for me to join.

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.

Hadji Ismail Ali: Since I know the Zionists very well, I was aware of their arrogance and foolishness. In addition, as I foresaw that the American and Western world would defend them and cover up any crimes they would commit, I did not think that this was a far-fetched possibility. Indeed, I witnessed with my own eyes the massacres they carried out against defenceless civilians, the first time in my village al-Dawayima, and then many times in several villages and cities of my occupied homeland for years.

Mustafa Ismail: To tell the truth, I had no definite opinion on this matter. If the Zionists were able to think rationally, they would not have attacked a civilian flotilla carrying humanitarian aid while the whole world was watching. On the other hand, the Zionists are arrogant people, and often arrogant people cannot measure their steps finely.

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

Hadji Ismail Ali: I had feelings difficult to express with words. My conviction that ours is a just cause strengthened. People from every class, religion, country and age were all together. There was an atmosphere of camaraderie that would be hard to find elsewhere. No one knew what awaits us. It was at that moment I realised that the occupation was doomed to end, and that the right/justice cannot be forgotten nor can it be worn away with lapse of time.

Mustafa Ismail: It was like a beehive. We were working ceaselessly, tirelessly, and conversing, discussing and exchanging views and experiences among people of different countries and cultures... This journey was a perfect opportunity to correct plenty of misconceptions about the Palestinian cause, as well as Arabs and Muslims that the Zionists had been working hard to stick in the minds of the masses for decades.

Could you please tell us what happened during the Israeli attack? How was the atmosphere? Also, I would like to learn your personal experiences and what you witnessed when you were all taken as captives on the ship and then detained in Israel.

Hadji Ismail Ali: We were praying the *fajr salah* (dawn prayer); while we were making *dua al-Qunut* (special supplication recited during the prayer), we heard an extremely loud noise. Zodiacs, warships, helicopters and sounds of bullets... I immediately went to the side of the ship and looked at the sea. I saw the zodiac boats just next to the ship, and some soldiers trying to board the ship while others were attacking with sound grenades and rubber bullets. I suppose they were also using live ammunition towards the passengers on deck.

At that moment, I pointed out a zodiac boat to some of our brothers. They began to spray pressurized water with fire-hoses to the zodiac. Then I was asked to go inside to the hall.

Later, they started firing at the activists using live ammunition. First the wounded and then the *shaheeds* (martyrs) began to be brought down in front of my eyes. I couldn't control myself and burst into tears. After a while, I got up and walked among the *shaheeds*, thinking that perhaps someone I knew would be among them. While looking I saw my son, he was lying dead as *shaheed* in front of me. Immediately I praised Allah that my son's blood had mixed up with the blood of Turks, and I prayed and asked Him that my son would be accepted, and that he would be *sha'fee* (intercessor) for me on the Day of Resurrection. However, hours later when we were taken out to the deck, I suddenly saw my son standing alive and well in front of me. I was very moved, and once again I praised Allah... Since all the affairs of the Muslim are all good.

Later, they detained all the passengers on the ship deck. Then they docked the ship at Ashdod Port, and disembarked us as prisoners one by one, taking us to the tent that had specially been prepared for our detention. Here an Israeli officer asked me if I wanted a medical examination or not; I refused. When he told me, "You have ille-

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gally entered the Israeli territory,” I immediately replied, without any hesitation, in Hebrew – the language they would understand: “Israeli pirates attacked us and seized our ship in international waters.” The Israeli officer got angry at this reply and looked at me saying, “Are you not dead yet!” At that moment I went fifty-six years back, to the two years that I had spent in the occupier’s prison, and immediately replied, “When you and your state die, and when I bury your state with my own hands, only then shall I die in peace in my homeland.”

Then they took us to Bi’r es-Sab’ [Beersheba] Prison. We were held prisoner there. They brought a piece of paper and wanted us to sign in order to be set free. On the paper it was written: “I accept that I have entered the Israeli territory illegally without official permission.” We all refused to sign, and I told them: “I will never and ever sign a document prepared in the name of Israeli state whose existence I do not accept at all.”

As a result of the growing international pressure, particularly that of Turkey, the occupier agreed to set us free. They wanted to send us to Jordan over the Sheikh Hussein Bridge. I was the first to be set free from the prison due to my age. There I saw the special prison vans that were being used to transport the prisoners. I immediately shouted, “We will never get on these prison vans that have been allocated for criminals like you. We will only get on air-conditioned buses which are more suited to our standing.”

When we approached the Jordanian border, we saw a big crowd waiting to meet us. However, out of the feeling of respect to the blood of the *shaheeds*, we were not in a celebratory mood; their memories in our hearts were still fresh. There, the first thing I said was: “We will be back soon... We will be back soon.... We will be back soon...”

Throughout eighty-two years of my life, I have never witnessed victory. However, on the deck of the *Mavi Marmara* I saw such youths that I believe, *insha’Allah* (if God wills), victory will be achieved with their efforts... The three days I spent on the *Mavi Marmara* reminded me the memories of the eighty-two years I have



Hadji Ismail Ali Nashwan beside the martyrs on the Mavi Marmara

spent in this world. I pray to Allah the Almighty to grant me a longer life in order to be part of the army that will liberate the holy al-Aqsa Mosque from the occupation of the pirate state, and that will put an end to the oppression inflicted on my people.

Mustafa Ismail Ali: On the night of the attack, we were in two groups on the deck of the ship. I was on the northern side. Around 3:00 a.m., we saw from a distance that warships were surrounding us. Around 4:00 a.m., I asked permission to recite the *adhan* (call to prayers) through the public address system, and went immediately for it. The attack started while we were praying *fajr salah*. But, with the help of Allah, we drove them back, using our hands, and the empty water bottles and juice boxes we founded on the ship deck. They were unable to board the ship...

We were neither aware of what was happening on the top deck where the commandos were fast-roping, nor inside the ship. As far as I remember, after about half an hour, we were ordered to surrender and go down inside the ship – apparently the Zionists had seized the boat. However, since we were suspicious of the accuracy of this order, my friends and I preferred to stay where we were. Then we saw the commandos coming towards us from every direction, and they handcuffed us behind our backs.

A few hours later, they started to make the activists out onto the deck. Our hands were handcuffed and heads looking down to the floor. Some time later, I plucked up my courage and turned back. All of a sudden I saw my father kneeling down right behind me. When he looked at me, I could see a sense of defeat and trouble in his eyes that I had never seen him like that before. (By the way, I was not yet aware that people had been *shaheeds*.) I said, “My dear father, you look very sad; but now is the time to keep our morale high.”

WHEN IT WAS NOON, I STOOD UP AND BEGAN TO RECITE THE *ADHAN*. SUDDENLY THE SOLDIERS POINTED THEIR GUNS AT ME, AND THE LASERS OF THEIR GUNS COVERED MY WHOLE BODY. THEY WERE FRIGHTENED BY THE *ADHAN*.

Immediately my father stood up, and headed for the washroom. Two soldiers immediately swooped down on him, and forced him to sit back. He yelled them (in Hebrew): "I want to go for performing *wudu* (ablution)."

After performing *wudu*, he came back, and his morale improved. The soldiers gradually began to loosen the tight handcuffs which had been giving us pain. At noon, I stood up and began to recite the *adhan*. Suddenly all the soldiers pointed their guns at me, and the lasers of their guns covered my whole body. They were frightened by the *adhan*... Later they took us to the lower deck. When we were inside, I performed prayers, we prayed *dhuhr* (noon) and *asr* (afternoon) prayers together in a small group. We remained in handcuffs until the next day. The disembarkation of all of us from the ship in Ashdod Port took until around 9:00 a.m. the following morning. By the way, our hands remained in handcuffs approximately from 6:00 a.m. on Monday morning until around 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday. We were all interrogated in Ashdod, and most of the participants refused to sign the documents that were given.

On the way to the prison, I started to describe certain places to our friends in prison van, most of whom were Turks. I know these places not personally but from my father's narratives. I mentioned the luxurious lives the Jews have been living in contrast to the suffering of the Palestinians. The friend sitting next to me was translating to the Turks what I told. Suddenly I noticed that the Turks got very angry. They would have ripped the bars off the prison van and gone out in order to defend the Palestinians, if they could... In prison, despite the objections of the guardians, we recited the *adhans* and prayed in *jama'ah* (congregation) with the help of the Turkish brothers.

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?

Hadji Ismail Ali: If we consider the events superficially and in the short term, it is clear that the aid cargo on the ships are not delivered directly by us to their rightful owners in Gaza, since they were



Hadji Ismail Ali Nashwan and his son Mustafa Ismail Nashwan

confiscated by the Zionists.¹ In addition, there were many *shaheeds* and wounded people. Such simple thinking leads to a conclusion that the Flotilla failed. However, the reality is totally different. I believe that this journey achieved great goals, and if this Flotilla had not set sail, it would have been impossible to achieve these goals. Some of the goals were achieved directly and rapidly, while others will be materialised in the mid to long term.

1. One of the most important consequences the Freedom Flotilla achieved was the return of the Palestinian cause to its natural course, and its inscription to the hearts of Arabs, Muslims and the whole world, through the mixing of Turkish blood with the blood of oppressed Palestinian people. Therefore, the Palestinian cause became the most important priority of the Turkish people; and Turkey has once again turned back to its natural position, as part of the *ummah*, and split from the Zionist project.
2. The Palestinian cause and the extent of oppression inflicted upon the Palestinian people has come to the top of the agenda of the Arabs, Muslims, and the entire world. This has enhanced the importance of this cause, as well as the feeling of taking part in the resolution of the Palestinian problem in people's hearts.
3. The true face of the Zionist mob, as well as its megalomania and oppression were exposed.
4. Objections rose against the Arab and the Muslim regimes, and this has jeopardized the survival of the regimes supporting the Zionist structure. The blood of the "Sea Martyrs" is blessed, and naturally its results will be blessed, too.

¹ The aid cargo of the Freedom Flotilla that was confiscated by the Israelis at first was delivered to the Gaza Strip by the United Nations later on.

THE 3 DAYS I SPENT ON THE MAVI MARMARA REMINDED ME THE MEMORIES OF THE 82 YEARS. THROUGHOUT 82 YEARS OF MY LIFE, I HAVE NEVER WITNESSED VICTORY. HOWEVER, ON THE DECK OF THE MAVI MARMARA I SAW SUCH YOUTHS THAT I BELIEVE, *INSHA'ALLAH*, VICTORY WILL BE ACHIEVED WITH THEIR EFFORTS.

Mustafa Ismail: I believe that the Freedom Flotilla was successful, and achieved much greater goals than the organizers had planned. It could have arrived in Gaza and unloaded its cargo; but after its return, this incident would have been forgotten. However, the arrogance and haughtiness of the Zionists had mistaken them, and thus, this journey has achieved goals that go far beyond short term or direct results, that future will reveal. On the road that leads to victory of people, the blood of the *shaheeds* is the first and critical step.

You are a first-hand witness of the Israeli aggression. What do you think about Israel?

Hadji Ismail Ali: As a person who has been closely following all the events for so many years, I have briefly such convictions about the Zionist project:

1. The West is well aware that under suitable conditions, their true competitor will be the Arab and the Islamic world.
2. For this reason, the West has created this [Zionist] structure in the heart of the region with full support and motivation as a spearhead and front line of their project. Thus thinking that there is a difference between the Western regimes and the Zionist structure would be naive; but of course, it cannot be claimed that the same is valid for their peoples, too.
3. Since its very foundation, the Zionist structure (the British Mandate on Palestine, which was representing the Western world at that time, cleared all the obstacles in the way of this structure and facilitated its establishment) has tried to uproot the existence of the Palestinians on their own lands through:
 - a) successive massacres for the expulsion of the residents from their homelands. In 1948, in my village of al-Dawayima, in the city of al-Halil [Hebron], I myself witnessed one of these massacres where more than 400 residents of the village lost their lives.
 - b) assimilating of all the remaining people within the Zionist project, through moral, cultural and even mental corruption in order to make



*Hadji Ismail Ali
Nashwan with
Türker Kağan Çetin,
the youngest passenger
of the Flotilla*

the native people a part of this project – just like what was done to the aboriginal peoples of Australia and of the Native Americans.

- c) dominating the neighbouring countries (like Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan), as well as the near abroad (such as Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia) through administrative and economic systems, and even educational programs.
- d) the Zionist idea of dominating not only Palestine but also the Middle East – which relies more on conspiracies, and security and intelligence operations rather than military activities.

However, I certainly believe that this project also has the factors that will bring its own end – that is corruption and arrogance. Despite all their efforts and the support that comes from the West, sooner or later, the Zionist project will doom; because they still have not comprehended that it is in the nature of this *ummah* to resist all the efforts of assimilation and submission.

My belief that the Israeli state will cease to exist is unwavering – there is no doubt at all in my mind. The incident of the Freedom Flotilla has strengthened this faith of mine.

What does the *Mavi Marmara* mean to you?

Hadji Ismail Ali: I bear witness that this ship is a blessed one surrounded by angels in the presence of the virtuous people and the circles of *dhikr* (remembrance of God, repeating His name in a rhythmic manner) during the voyage. Now the *Mavi Marmara* is a part of my soul, my body, my thought and my conscience.