

**MY BROTHER, WHO WAS SHOT TWICE  
IN THE LEG AND MADE TO WALK,  
FAINTED THREE TIMES ON THE WAY  
TO HELICOPTER**

**Maryam Luqman Talib**

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Maryam Luqman Talib (1992) is an Australian citizen of Sri Lankan origin, and a student in Pharmacy Faculty at Kuwait University. She joined the Gaza Freedom Flotilla with her brother Ahmed Luqman Talib (1990) who studies International Relations at Griffith University, and also his wife Jerry Campbell (1988) who is a nursing student at Griffith University in Australia.

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

The main reason for me to join the Freedom Flotilla is that the issue of Palestine, the issue of Gaza, and what is happening there is like the sum of injustice that has been happening all over the world – I mean all happening in just one little land. Particularly what is happening in Gaza for too long is something that cannot be watched, but also something that has been purposely ignored by our governments, by those people in power. So when I was blessed with this opportunity, I felt that I would be committing a crime not to take it – having the door opened to me and me not having gone through with it.

**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.**

Personally I kept all the options open having read the news until the day we departed. I also did keep in mind that it is the Zionist regime's nature to have no consciousness, no care and no heart for anyone who resists their thinking and their policies. Clear evidence for this was the latest war in Gaza [Operation Cast Lead in late 2008-early 2009] in which they killed hundreds of children. So keeping all these in mind, I did keep this alternative open; but I did not realise that they lack the intelligence, and that they were blinded so much to have done it in international waters. Clearly the overwhelming international outcry following this massacre has proven that Israel is really incapable of standing on its two feet. Israel is falling, and everyone is watching.

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

The spirit on the ship before and after the attack was one that was all just beautiful. I do not think that I will ever experience such an atmosphere anywhere else. We had people that we could not communicate with, but our hearts could communicate. We had people from different colours, religions, languages and races. Everyone knew that whatever we were going to get through, we would get through together. There was so much unity, so much love. There was just peace.

**Could you please tell us what happened during the Israeli attack? How was the atmosphere? I wonder about your personal experiences.**

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The night before the massacre, they were trying to organize within the women an emergency aid team in case of anything. Because I am a pharmacy student at the second year, they put me in the aid team... Up until the *adhan* (call to prayer) I was on the deck with the press in order to see eventually what was happening. Just as the *adhan* began I went down with the Turkish sisters, because we wanted to pray *salah al-fajr* (dawn prayer) with *jama'ah* (congregation) downstairs at the women's cabin. I was downstairs praying my *salah*. Soon after that, one of the Turkish sisters who was in charge of us said, "The emergency aid team, where are they? Where are they?" I and my brother's wife, who is a nurse, just ran to the hall allocated for the wounded, and we were one of the first to get there. They brought in one body, one of the brothers who had a severe wound. Until that time I had no idea what was happening on upper decks. Even I had seen the helicopter – since I was on the deck until the *adhan* – I did not realise that they would attack so fast since we were in international waters. This was the main ground for me to keep calm.

The first, then the second, then the third, and then the fourth person was dragged in, I was still busy with them. When the fifth person was just dragged in, I saw his face; he was my brother and was shot twice on his leg. But it was just his leg, whereas some other people were shot on their chests; so I did not look so much on my brother. Actually at that moment I thought, "So what if he is my brother? These are all my brothers." Also my brother's wife was just behind me, and I didn't want to tell her, because she might have fainted or done something else. But *alhamdulillah* (praise be to God) nothing happened.

It just kept, every few seconds more and more bodies came. There was blood everywhere, and the bodies were carried up to the couches... When I started pharmacy faculty, I had in my mind that eventually I could go to the war zones and help people. Having that

in mind might be what really pushed me there. You wanted this, so here you are! But I did not witness the actual situation; I was in the background just hearing the speakers about what was going on. When I heard the announcement, “We have surrendered, and we are now officially occupied by the Israeli soldiers,” then I understood that the situation was very serious.

**You were all taken captive on the ship, and then forced to sail to Ashdod Port. Could you please tell us your story about what happened during that time?**

The process of detention was nearly the same for all of us. They did not split us off, thank God, because of the brothers’ resistance. We were taken out, and detained first in two different locations of the ship. They discriminated us based on nationality. Because I am holding an Australian passport, they took me and my brother’s wife in most separately. Obviously by this time, we had split with my brother, too; he was taken to the helicopter. To be honest, I did not even see him while being taken, but heard it. My brother was shot twice in the leg, and was not able to walk. He was bleeding so much that we had to look for blood transfusion. You can imagine the state he was in, fresh from his injuries. Without any physical support or someone’s aid, he was made to walk upstairs in order to get to the helicopter. For this reason, he fainted three times on the way to the helicopter. I think it is important to know this, so that people understand the true nature of the Zionist regime. These people are not human! There is no humanity in them!

**Did you experience or witness any torture or abuse, either psychological or physical, both on the ship and in Israel?**

Actually everything was an abuse. For the sisters, it was mainly verbal abuse, psychological warfare, staring and all this. The way I had chosen to combat was that the only things I took when leaving the ship were my passport and my Qur’an; so throughout the whole searching process, I was just reading my Qur’an, and they could not stop me. Were they gonna touch the Qur’an? No. It’s a holy book. At least I put them to the test, and they did not seem to do that.

Later on, I witnessed another thing. Once we went to the airport, they were trying to deport us. I was with a group of thirteen sisters most of whom were from the Challenger boat. At the airport, we were surrounded by a good forty-fifty soldiers and the police. By the way, before arriving at the airport we were stuck in a van maybe

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for eleven hours, it was getting hot. Once we came out, we did not know what was happening, so we requested for our embassy which was in our legal rights. We kept requesting, and we stood for it. Since we resisted, the number of soldiers around us increased. We were forced upstairs. There again we put forth our simple request. We were not asking for too much, but needed to see our consulates, our ambassadors in order to make a decision. Where are you deporting us? What's happening? They would not answer anything. We did not trust them anyway. Because we had resisted in this way, they tried to humiliate and weaken us. But after seeing that it wasn't working, one of them decided "That's it!" and pushed one of us. We were in a tight group together, and so as soon as they pushed one of us, we were all like "What's happening?" Then more and more came, and one soldier in particular came to one of our sisters (maybe Greek or Dutch) and whacked her in the head three times and started to pull her hair. I was standing just behind her. I was deadlocked in shock. But of course the fighting did not stop, because as soon as he hit one of us very hard, we were going to defend ourselves. This was amazing. For a man to have done it to a woman, it was much uglier. What is more, he was fully armed and we were just with our passports, defenceless.

**Could you please share with us the most striking events, tragic or surprising, that you experienced or witnessed on this journey, and will never forget throughout your life?**

I don't have any specific situation, but I remember just the whole experience. I don't think there is anything that I can forget from the people to the incidents, to the Israeli soldiers... But I want people to know one thing: I really felt that people who are trying within their capacity, who are trying to use the resources which God gave them to fight for the truth, will never feel any anxiety or worry. Two hours after the massacre, we were all detained in one small room, no air-conditioning and nothing at all, and many of us handcuffed. We were surrounded by the soldiers. They got us, and just waited with guns in their hands for anyone to do anything. But with courage, – despite having known that there is cold blood on their hands – many of our



*Maryam Luqman Talib and her sister-in-law Jerry Campbell on the Mavi Marmara*

brothers and sisters were mocking them, were shouting back and resisting. We knew that they killed us, we knew that our brothers gave their lives for this cause, but that did not stop us. They tried to detain us, they tried to put fear in our hearts, but it was only their hearts that felt this fear and we proved that to them. Many of them got agitated because we were protesting, even though we were under siege, even though we were all captives. But that peace, that courage and that tranquillity were from God. People need to understand that.

**Israel claims that there were “terrorists” on the ship. What do you think about about that?**

We heard this claim not just in this situation. It is a claim that the superpowers and the Zionist regime repeatedly put forth, in an effort to brainwash the minds of the masses. Clearly after having done such a fatal mistake to their own policy and to their own future, it is really ridiculous for them to put forth such claims. If they really think that we are terrorists, I have a message to them: I am proud to put terror in the heart of the Zionist regime. On the other hand, people know very well that we are only peaceful activists. So this claim is invalid and baseless.

**After all these experiences, would you like to join another mission that sails to Gaza?**

The amount of miracles we saw in this journey was just numerous. It was a blessed journey. We, as the first-hand witnesses of the Zionist terror, have to decide what the strategy should be, how should we make use of this experience to lead a campaign. It is really very difficult for me to tell you in words how I feel now. I am very

happy and of course grateful. I am just waiting for the announcement to go back again. I hope to be a part of an organization from the Gulf, and mobilise the people of Kuwait where I currently live.

**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?**

I think the only people who would see all these as tragedy are the people who did not want it to be a success. Everyone who understands the cause, everyone who understands the truth cannot see this anything else than a success. I would like to give you an example back from Australia. The Australian state and authority have stressed over the years to maintain some very very little coverage on Palestine, and they succeeded. After the incident, after my brother was shot as an Australian male citizen, the Australian papers, radios and televisions have all focused on the subject. Many of the Australian citizens had very little or no idea about Gaza and about the siege. They only knew very little information which the Zionists wanted them to know of. This incident has just blown the cover. Now people are wondering and asking “Why did they shoot?” and logic is starting to set in and people are starting to look things up. So it is a success by all means. We feel honoured that Allah has given us the opportunity to have been part of this struggle and to have been part of this success. We are humble, but we ask Allah to give us a bigger role in the liberation of Palestine and in the lifting of the siege.

**Yesterday, you saw the *Mavi Marmara* again. How do you feel about it?<sup>1</sup>**

When I first got onto it in May 2010, my connection with it was just on a more humanitarian basis, I mean using this blessed ship only to go and do a certain mission. But now I feel it really so close. It is very difficult to put my personal emotional attachment to the *Mavi Marmara* in specific words. People may think it is just physically a ship, but it really added so much into my life. It is like a school that taught me so many things at so many different levels. It is a symbol of freedom that keeps going.

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<sup>1</sup> This question was asked on 27 December 2010 when Maryam Luqman Talib came Istanbul to meet the *Mavi Marmara* ship.