

WE DOCUMENTED THE BRUTALITY AND THE TRUE FACE OF ISRAEL

Nadeem Ahmed Khan

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Nadeem Ahmed Khan (1967) is a Pakistani who lives both in Pakistan and Turkey. He is the Chairman of Khubaib Foundation, the partner organization of the IHH in Pakistan, and is a lawyer by profession. He completed his BA in Political Science and Economics from Gordon College Rawalpindi in 1987, and did his MA in Political Science from Punjab University in 1988. He graduated in Shariah and Law from International Islamic University-Islamabad in 1992. He started practice as a lawyer in 1992, and became a member of High Court bar in 1995 and a member of tax bar association of Islamabad as well. He established Khubaib Foundation in 1999. As a chairman of this foundation, he established five big colleges in different cities of Pakistan having more than three thousand students mostly orphans and deserving; and organized massive rescue, relief and rehabilitation operations in post-9/11 for Afghan refugees, and for the affected people of earthquake 2005 and flood of 2010. He represented Pakistan on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla.

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

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. The first and the foremost point is that there is a very serious situation of human rights violations in Gaza. So, as a human rights worker, it was my duty to join this Flotilla. The second reason was that this was a project in which people from all over the world – irrespective of their religions, unmindful of their professions, and beyond their political affiliations – were there to serve the humanity. So these were the most important reasons for me to join the Freedom Flotilla.

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

Everybody on the ship was highly motivated despite the expectation of danger or trouble. We were on the mission of service to humanity. Nobody was afraid of anything. I never saw any fear in the eyes of anybody; even after the attack, they rather expressed a unique kind of patience. This was something extraordinary.

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 had not slept that night. I was on the upper deck where the broadcasting was going on. So when the first three spots were seen around 23:00, there was a feeling that they might attack us. While we were preparing for *fajr* (dawn) prayer around 4:00 a.m., I saw them trying to come up the ship. What I expected was that they would encircle the ship and stop us, instead of trying to enter the ship. However, they approached with zodiac boats, and started coming up. We resisted just by throwing water on them. So, the water we threw and the air pressure stopped them to enter, and the boats went away. Meanwhile, I came to the third deck. I saw the helicopter above, and the commandos started landing on the top deck. Then there was an announcement that we were under their siege. My wife, Nalan [Dal], was also there, and she said to me that they have started live firing. We resisted, but I myself did not see one-to-one fight. After that the helicopter went away, and again the boats approached. So I went down again and saw many people wounded. I also helped carrying some wounded people from the top deck to downstairs. The armed attack of the Israelis was very unnatural, and an inhuman behaviour made against civilians.

THERE ARE 9 MARTYRS, BUT THE LIVES OF THESE MARTYRS AND THEIR BLOOD HAVE GIVEN LIFE TO THE GAZANS. THERE ARE MANY FURQANS ALREADY DYING IN GAZA, BUT THE DEATH OF FURKAN DOĞAN HAS HIGHLIGHTED THIS ISSUE, AND HE BECAME A SHINING STAR WHICH PUT LIGHT ON IT.

Then you were all taken captive on the ship, and then forced to sail to Ashdod Port. Could you please tell us your story while you were captives both on board and in Israel?

When the Israelis made an announcement, we were sitting in a hall on the ship. Then after some time, they took us outside one by one, carried out body search, and tied our hands on our backs. They forced everybody to line up on the knees. I was very disturbed for the old people and the wounded that were made kneel down with their hands tied. There were also some people who wanted to go to washroom, but not allowed for a long time. These were some of the misbehaviours of the Israelis. At midnight, they took us to Ashdod Port where many “guests!” were waiting cheerfully, and we had to cross through.

Personally I was searched but not misbehaved. They were saying, “The airplane is ready; you will be deported to Turkey.” So psychologically we were at ease. But since at the last moment they said, “No, you’re going to prison,” my Pakistani friends were a little mentally disturbed. When they took us to prison, they told us, “You’re here for a long period of time.” I asked the superintendent of the jail, “How many days you think we’ll stay here?” He said, “You’re here for at least six months.” Being under the custody of these people for six months! It was a shock, we were disturbed. Then they put us in the lockup.

My colleague from *AAJ TV* Syed Talat Hussain said, “Nadeem, I am not feeling well, you tell them to open the door.” When I just went down for interrogation – by the way this time the officers making interrogation were from Social Welfare Ministry – I told them about my friend who was in the cell, but they never listened. Then another person, Srdjan Stojiljković [the cameraman of Iara Lee], who was staying with us in the cell, said that Talat had fainted and fallen down. So we immediately rushed up, and they opened the door. My friend Talat was psychologically and physically out, he was on the

WHEN I REACHED ASHDOD, MY PERSONAL FEELING WAS AMAZING. I WAS EXTREMELY HAPPY THAT I WAS NEAR AL-QUDS; I FELT JUST AS IF I WAS IN UMRAH. AS EMOTIONALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY I WAS ATTACHED TO THE LAND, I WAS NOT DISTURBED AT ALL. I DON'T KNOW WHICH PROPHETS HAD LIVED OR PASSED THE PLACE WHERE I WAS.

floor. I picked him up on my knee and tried to talk to him. With very difficulty he said, "I got a heart attack." I was very disturbed, since if he really had a heart attack, it was very difficult for somebody to come and give first-aid. So these were very difficult moments for me, but in any case, *alhamdulillah* (praise be to God), Allah helped us. He did not have a heart attack, but was in a psychological and physical trauma. Maybe about fifteen minutes later, some Israeli first-aid came and took him to the hospital. Then he came back after two hours, he was a little okay, but was extremely psychologically disturbed. This was the detail very precisely.

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 had never expected that Israelis would come on the high seas, and attack us at night. So this was the strangest thing for me, a shocking thing that I will always remember. This was also my first experience to deal with the Israelis. The second thing was that when I reached Ashdod Port, my personal feeling was amazing. I can't explain that to you. I was extremely happy that I was in al-Quds [Jerusalem], because this is within the limit of *al-Haram* (holy site) since in the Qur'an, Allah says "*Barakna havlehu* (We blessed around it)". I felt just as if I was in *umrah* (lesser pilgrimage). So I was not disturbed at all psychologically or physically, neither in prison nor when they were searching me. I was confident of my whole team that *insha'Allah* (if God wills) we all would be together out, and Israel could not do anything. When I was there I recited *Surah al-Fatihah* for all the prophets, everybody who was buried there. So, emotionally and psychologically I was attached to the land. I don't know who prayed on the place where I was praying, I don't know which prophets had lived or passed the place where I was. So my feeling was different from others.



The Pakistanis welcoming Nadeem Ahmed Khan when he returned to his country

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?

The first thing that we should understand from the Islamic point of view and also from the humanistic point of view is that anybody who is dying in Palestine or in Afghanistan or in Kashmir or in Bosnia or in Chechnya, we are all equal. We all believe in one God, we all believe in the Qur'an. There are nine martyrs, but the lives of these martyrs and their blood have given life to the Gazans. There are many Furqans already dying in Gaza, but the death of Furkan [Doğan] has highlighted this issue; he became a shining star which put light on it. So, if you consider your life more important than the life of anybody else, then this project loses its aim. We consider everybody equal. There were Jews, Christians, Muslims and atheists on the Flotilla, and all were saying, "The human life is in danger in Gaza." So, the lives of these nine martyrs were not wasted at all, they are alive as Allah says in the Qur'an.

The Flotilla brought not only the *ummah* (the Muslim nation) closer to each other but also the humanity together to take care of others. So Allah gave this forum to the IHH, and in that sense, there is no such second example of this in the world.

The aim of the Flotilla was not just to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza, but also to highlight the issue of Gaza siege, and to show the world the true face of Israel. The Flotilla in fact documented a Dracula, a very dangerous creature who comes at nights, takes the blood of the children in Gaza, and runs away so that nobody can

see who it is. The world was considering Israel a very humble, a very gentle state; but our brothers' cameras documented and presented to the world how this Dracula is sucking the blood. They documented the brutality of Israel, the true face of it.

Now, unfortunately the world has not done anything concrete although a year past. But fortunately for the first time Israel was criticized all over the world. The United Nations' report said they did wrong. It is very important that at least somebody started talking about Israel's wrongdoings. Before that, despite Israel's cruel and inhuman attacks on Palestinians and its massacres, nobody was criticizing or even mentioning it. So I believe what the Flotilla did was a marvellous achievement. It was a success story. It has achieved its aims. You know after the Flotilla attack and just we were in prison, the UN Security Council meeting was held, the whole world was shattered and moved, and the Rafah border had to be opened by Egyptian authorities.

Are you hopeful of the ongoing international legal proceedings?

Determination of the legal right and getting the legal right are two different things. The legal right has already been determined. Everybody said that the crime was committed. Everybody gave their judgment that Israel did wrong. We applied to the court for the judgment. The court procedure is there, and will definitely give the same judgment. There is no chance that the court decides that the act of Israel was right; no law of the world, neither the international law nor humanitarian law can say it. This is number one. Number two, the court can delay but cannot deny, they have to give the judgment. After the judgment of the court, the hardest stage comes: the implementation. To tell the truth I don't expect a proper implementation of the order given by the court; the implementation will be difficult. Nonetheless getting the judgment from the court is very important which I believe we will get it.

What does the *Mavi Marmara* mean to you?

The three days we spent on the *Mavi Marmara* was like thirty years of my life. Yesterday [26 December 2010] I boarded the *Mavi Marmara* again, and it was just as if I was in my mother's home, the old home where I grew up in my childhood. So my feeling, my affiliation was very strange. I sat on the places where we had slept, sat, and lived. I have respected the organization done by our brothers one more time.