

**WE EXPERIENCED ON THE *MAVI MARMARA*
WHAT THE PROPHET AND HIS COMPANIONS
HAD EXPERIENCED**

Nur Fitri Moeslim Taher

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Nur Fitri Moeslim Taher (1976) is from Indonesia. She is a housewife, and has three children aged 10, 6 and 5. She is a volunteer of the Medical Emergency Rescue Committee (MER-C) which is a non-governmental organization in Indonesia to help the victims of wars, conflicts and natural disasters. She used to teach in Jakarta Islamic School, but after the *Mavi Marmara* incident she decided to become a freelance writer.

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

I'm a member of the Medical Emergency Rescue Committee (MER-C) from Indonesia. During the Israeli attack on Gaza in December 2008-January 2009, the MER-C team went to Gaza, and stayed there for three months. At that time we were given a piece of land by the Gazan authorities to build a hospital. Then donations were given by the Indonesian people, the engineers in MER-C designed the hospital, and we were ready for the construction. But the problem was that we couldn't go to Gaza. So we would take hold of any chance that was available for taking us back to Gaza. That's why we joined the Gaza Freedom Flotilla.

How many Indonesians joined the Flotilla?

There were twelve people from Indonesia. From my NGO, it was me and three other volunteers that joined. We also took one journalist with us. Two of the Indonesian people were shot during the attack: Okvianto Emil Baharudin was shot in his forearm which was broken into three¹; Surya Fachrizal Aprianus Ginting was shot in his right chest, and the bullet didn't go through but went right down hurting his lung, his diaphragm, his eighth rib, his liver, and then stop right before his pelvic bone. They are okay now, *alhamdulillah* (praise be to God).

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.

No, no, no. I expected that they would not let us go into Gaza. I expected to be blocked, maybe taken back to Cyprus to negotiate. But an attack? No, I never expected it.

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

Oh my God! It was so wonderful. One night there was a group of people, and one person kept singing and singing and singing. I said to myself, "This IHH volunteer's voice is very good." So I joined

¹ Okvianto Emil Baharudin got shot while trying to stop the Israeli soldiers from entering the *Mavi Marmara* with water cannon on the third deck. He is an auditor of the Garuda Indonesia Airlines, and active in Indonesian Committee for the Palestine Solidarity (KISPA).

and said, "Go on, sing again, sing again," and I asked other people to sing also. And then brother Ahmet Emin [Dağ] called me and asked, "Are you enjoying the free concert?" Then I learnt that this guy was Ömer Karaoğlu [one of the pioneers of Islamic music in Turkey]... So, obviously, everything was great. I've made new friends; I've had new mothers and a new family. It's been wonderful.

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

During the attack, at first I was in the women's cabin. Then I was called to give a statement in front of the camera. I thought to myself what can I do to stay here and not go back into the women's hall. So I asked my doctor friend Arief Rachman, an Indonesian doctor from the MER-C team, "Can I be your assistant?" and he accepted. So from then on I became his assistant, and during the Israeli attack, I was tending the wounded with him.

I helped Doctor Arief while tending three wounded brothers. One was an English Palestinian, Osama Qashoo. We thought he was shot, because he was hyperventilating. Doctor Arief asked me to look for his wound, but I couldn't find it. So Doctor Arief said, "Okay, he is in shock, just calm him down." When I just calmed him down, he grabbed my hand saying, "No matter what happens, protect the captain's room," and then he ran back to the front.

The second person was a Turk, I think. I looked for his wound, but couldn't find again. Doctor Arief said, "Okay, maybe a rubber bullet, just calm him down." I think he was more shocked than Osama, because he was shaking and kept saying the *shahadah* (the Muslim declaration of belief). I told him, "Brother, you are okay, you are fine." While I was trying to calm this brother, I was called by Doctor Arief, "Come, come, come. There is another victim!"

It was Cevdet Kılıçlar. Three of the people who tended Cevdet were Doctor Arief, Osama and me. Again I looked for his wound, because that was all I knew since I have no medical experience. But I couldn't see any wound on his body. I was thinking, "How come this person is not moving, and how come the blood underneath him keeps flowing more and more." I saw something very small right in the middle of his forehead. I thought it was a pimple or something like that. Doctor Arief was looking for Cevdet's heartbeat, but he couldn't find it. At that moment Osama was supporting Cevdet's

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head. Probably he felt something, so he put Cevdet's head on his thigh or on the floor, and then he looked at his hand. It was filled with pieces of brain and blood. Osama started howling and howling and howling. I've never heard any man scream and cry like that before. Whenever I think of that experience, I don't know what saddens me more, was it to see Cevdet dying or to hear Osama crying like that... I had to pull Osama back, because with his bloody hands he was caressing Cevdet's face, and so it made everything look worse. Mr. Bülent Yıldırım came and said, "Osama, enough!" and he finally listened to Mr. Bülent. I called someone from downstairs to grab a stretcher to put Cevdet on. Before that Doctor Arief was screaming, "I need a cloth, I need a cloth." I couldn't find any cloth. So I said *istighfar* (seeking forgiveness from God) and took my headscarf off. I don't know whether it was used or not. I saw someone who had a scarf on his neck, so I pulled and put it on as my *hijab* (headscarf).

These were the most painful experiences for me. After that the white flag was waved. Everyone was asked to go down, and we became captives.

How was the atmosphere on the ship during the attack?

During the attack everyone was very alert, but I didn't see anyone panicking. I think it was because Allah was giving us the *sakinah* (tranquillity, divine peace) feeling. Now I'm thinking that people are afraid of war, because they are not in it. Once you are in war or under attack, it is not as scary as you think.

What was the most striking event that you experienced or witnessed, and will never forget throughout your life? Is it the case of Osama Qashoo and Cevdet Kılıçlar, or any other event?

There is another experience, not mine but Doctor Arief's, which I will never forget. It was when we were handcuffed, and given the



Muhammad Yasin (TVOne), (...), Doctor Arief Rachman (MER-C), Nur Fitri Moeslim Taher and Nur Ikhwan (MER-C)

chance to distribute water. Doctor Arief saw a group of international volunteers including Turks. They received one glass of water, but didn't drink it thinking, "There may not be enough water, and if I drink, maybe another brother who is thirstier than me won't be able to drink." So that glass of water passed around until someone told them, "Drink one or two sips, *insha'Allah* (if God wills) it will be enough." Then people started to drink it... It reminded us the story of Ikrimah Ibn Abi Jahl, the *sahabah* (companions) of the Prophet, who didn't drink water but passed it to another, and when his turn came he had already died... When I heard this experience of Doctor Arief, I thought, "Oh my God, we are experiencing what the Prophet and the *sahabah* had experienced." That's really amazing.

Could you please tell us your story about what happened when you were taken to Ashdod Port? Did you experience or witness any torture or abuse, either psychological or physical?

After that terrible attack, for me nothing mattered anymore... During the interrogation, the Israeli guy who was holding my passport asked me my name, and I told it. Then he asked, "Are you from Indonesia?" and I said, "Yes." He asked me, "Did you come here by yourself?" I wouldn't answer that I was from the MER-C, because it could have jeopardized my organization. So I said, "I request to be with an attorney." He asked the same question again, and I answered the same. He said, "Where do you think you are? Indonesia?"

I REALISED THAT THE ISRAELIS ARE PARANOID ABOUT ANYONE AND EVERYONE EXCEPT FOR THEMSELVES. THAT'S WHY THEY CAN DO ANYTHING. THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS AS LONG AS THEY FEEL THAT THEY ARE PROTECTED AND SAFE.

Malaysia? Don't you know that Indonesia doesn't have an embassy in Israel?" and I said, "Then I wanna see the United Nations' representative." He became angry and said, "United Nations' representation huh? You're getting the whole idea wrong! You are going into jail." Then he showed me to the bus.

I was waiting for a UN representative to come since my country doesn't have a representative there, but they didn't come. I prayed, "Oh my God, I can only hope for your miracle," because there was no one to hope for. Fortunately Jordan accommodated everyone whose country doesn't have a representative in Israel. So I was one of the first people who got out from jail, and we were taken to Jordan.

What about in the prison...

It was okay. The building looked new, newly painted, as if it was just prepared for us. We were the only ones who were in it. After all we had been through, the prison was nothing really.

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

I believe Israel needs to have a new dictionary with a new definition for what a terrorist is, especially after what I have experienced on the *Mavi Marmara*; since terrorists according to the Israelis are those who help people, who love others, who fight for human rights, and who wouldn't let anything bad happen to anyone else in the world, especially to the Palestinian people.

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

Yes, *insha'Allah* I will.

Do you think the Freedom Flotilla achieved its goals? What are the most important achievements of the Flotilla?

Finally the whole world sees what is going on in Palestine. For example, I have a very very ignorant friend who is now aware of what's going on, and starts caring about the issue of Palestine for the first time. People are now watching what's happening there. More and more countries are recognising the independence of Palestine. So if that organization is called unsuccessful, I don't know what is.

**How was the atmosphere when you returned to your country?
How did people react to your participation in the Flotilla?**

People said, "I wish I were with you," and asked, "Can I be with you the next time?" On the other hand, the question that was asked the most was, "You have kids. Why did you leave them? Weren't you afraid that you might die there?" I said, "Look, death happens everywhere, even if I stay home and have tea in my own room. If my time comes, I will die. It is better to die in pursuit of a cause, a worthwhile cause, than when doing nothing."

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

Now I realised that they are paranoid. Mostly they are paranoid about anyone and everyone except for themselves. That's why they can do anything. They don't care about the consequences of their actions as long as they feel that they are protected and safe.

What does the *Mavi Marmara* mean to you?

I've found a new family. I am so glad to have met all these people. When the *Mavi Marmara* returned yesterday [26 December 2010], we all cried. It was a mixture of happiness and sadness. All the memories came back again. I wanna be on it again.