

**ISRAELIS HAVE BUILT A COUNTRY  
ON BLOOD AND HATRED,  
AND LIVE IN FEAR OF EVERYTHING**

**Ouassima Ibn Salah**

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Ouassima Ibn Salah (1981) is a Moroccan journalist who has been living in Turkey for the last three years. She graduated from Damascus University Department of Journalism in 2005, and now is a correspondent of *Al Jazeera Net* and also a Moroccan daily, *Al Massae*.

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

I decided to join the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, because the international society remains silent and inactive to support the people of Palestine in their occupied homeland. The worst was that even though the whole world had witnessed on televisions the Israeli crimes in Gaza during the twenty-two days attack in late 2008 and early 2009, and especially the killing of babies and kids, no concrete actions were taken at all. Besides this, although the illegal siege with which the people of Gaza have suffered a lot is a violation of the whole international law, nothing was done to end or break the siege. So I wanted to be one of the few people who were willing to risk their lives and leave their families and homes in order to support and take the side of the people of Gaza; because when the whole world remains blind, someone should tell the truth and say “Stop!” to Israel.

**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.**

I expected that they would stop us once we approached the territorial waters of Gaza, and maybe they would ask us to go back to our countries, or the worst possibility, we would be captured and put in a jail. But I didn't expect that they would attack us in international waters in such violent and bloody way.

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

The atmosphere was just great. People from different nationalities, religions and ideologies were all together smiling, talking about different subjects, trying to understand each other and sharing food. The ship was so clean and organized, because everyone was doing his or her duty in a perfect way without any complaints – on the contrary, the smiles were the title of everyone's face. The most amazing moments for me were when a boat [Challenger 1] joined the Flotilla, and the participants began singing song of Palestine, resistance and freedom, waving the Palestinian flag to each other from boat to boat, and jumping from place to place... It was just amazing to see this harmony among the strangers from different countries acting like one family.

**Could you please tell us what happened during the Israeli attack? How was the atmosphere?**

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A SHIP, IS A SYMBOL OF HONOUR, HUMANITY,  
SOLIDARITY AND COURAGE. IT IS THE HOPE THAT  
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UNITED, AND THERE ARE STILL CONSCIOUS PEOPLE  
IN THE WORLD FIGHTING AGAINST THE INJUSTICE.

When the attack started, the ship almost turned into a war field: various sounds of bombs and weapons firing; everywhere full of smoke and blood; wounded people laying on the floor bleeding, and doctors, nurses and other participants trying to help them... Actually it was the prayer time when the Israeli commandos started attacking since they knew that people would be busy and without protection during the prayer time. The commandos began getting down the ship from military helicopter and also shooting from zodiacs. On the other hand, the passengers had no weapons but threw bottles of water, chairs and such things in order to be able to save their lives, protect the ship and the humanitarian aids.

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

When they took me out of the pressroom, I was shocked by the image of the participants: the men kneeling on the wet floor with their hands cuffed behind their back; even there were wounded people and women handcuffed. The Israeli soldiers were everywhere shouting and cursing... The helicopter above us was making a storm upon the waters, so it was raining upon our heads and sopping us wet. Also the sound of the helicopter was so loud that we couldn't hear anything else. Then they gathered us down in a hall where there was no oxygen at all, and kept there shouting in our faces and the same bad behaviours, even threatening and beating some of us.

Before we got on the prison bus, the soldiers took off the sweater I had on my shoulders. When I asked, "Please give it back to me, it is a gift from a friend of mine," they laughed loudly with irony, and one of them told me with hatred in his voice: "What? Friend? You are in Israel!" A message that the Israelis don't believe in anything called friendship; everyone is an enemy for them.



*Ouassima Ibn Salah at the press conference on the Mavi Marmara on 30 May 2010*

**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?**

The death of one of the martyrs, Cengiz Songür... People were trying to help and resuscitate him by performing CPR, but unfortunately he just gave his last breath in front of my eyes.

The brain of Uğur Süleyman Söylemez out of his head after being hit... While being carried by the participants who were trying to help him, I thought he had already died by that time. I was surprised when I came back and heard that he is still in coma. Allah knows if he will make it or not, but we keep praying for him.

An Israeli soldier put a weapon in the back of an old Jordanian man [Ismail Ali Nashwan] who was barely walking...

These are the most striking scenes for me that I will never forget.

**Do you think the Freedom Flotilla was successful, and fulfilled its goals? What are the most important achievements of the Flotilla?**

The Flotilla was a great achievement for the humanity, because for the first time citizens in all over the world went out to the streets to protest Israel against its crimes. Israel for the first time isolated from the international society; I'm sure nothing will be the same again, and it will never be perceived as a victim. No one believes the lies of Israel anymore, since people get to see the right picture, and began to support the Gazans and the Palestinian issue wholeheartedly. Also people from all over the world, especially the peace activists and human rights workers, get to know and understand each

other more, and have started to work together for the same goal, for the good of humanity and world peace.

**How did people react to you and to the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla when you returned to your country?**

Except my family and friends, the Moroccan government showed no reaction for what happened. They ignored even the participation of Moroccans in the Freedom Flotilla. I guess it was because the Moroccan government has good relations with the Israeli government.

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

They are killers and cowards who are just killing unarmed innocent people and babies. They have built a country on blood and hatred, and they live in fear of everything. The only language they speak is killing!

**What does the *Mavi Marmara* mean to you?**

*Mavi Marmara*, although being just a ship, is a symbol of honour, humanity, solidarity and courage. It is the hope that we, as people, can achieve anything if we are united, and there are still conscious people in the world fighting against the injustice.