

Gaza Flotilla Activists Allege Abuse in Israeli Detention



Images

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Pro-Palestinian activists deported after Israel intercepted a Gaza-bound aid flotilla in international waters have accused Israeli forces of abuse and mistreatment during detention.

More than 50 vessels belonging to the Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF) had sailed from Turkey last week with the aim of breaking Israel's maritime blockade on Gaza and delivering humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies. Israeli commandos intercepted the flotilla west of Cyprus earlier this week and detained hundreds of activists on board.

According to Israeli authorities, the operation was necessary because the flotilla was allegedly serving the interests of Hamas and was described by officials as a "public relations stunt." The detained activists were transferred to Israeli vessels and later taken to detention facilities after arriving at the port of Ashdod. On 21 May, Israel deported 422 activists from 41 countries. Following their return home, several participants accused Israeli security personnel of violence, humiliation, and sexual abuse while in custody. Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand stated that Canada had received reports detailing the "appalling abuse" of Canadian citizens detained in Israel. She strongly condemned the alleged mistreatment and called for accountability.

Germany and Spain also confirmed that some of their citizens had returned with injuries. Spain's Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said that four Spanish activists required medical treatment after their release.

The organizers of the Global Sumud Flotilla alleged that detainees suffered severe mistreatment, including physical assaults and sexual violence. They claimed there were at least 15 cases of sexual assault, while others reportedly sustained broken bones and injuries caused by rubber bullets.

Israel's prison service rejected the allegations, calling them "false and entirely without factual basis." Officials insisted that all detainees were treated according to Israeli law and received proper medical care.

The Israel Defense Forces also denied wrongdoing, stating that military procedures require respectful treatment of flotilla participants and that no known violations had occurred. The military added that any formal complaints would be investigated thoroughly.

Several activists gave emotional testimonies after returning to their countries.

French activist Meriem Hadjal alleged that she experienced sexual violence and physical assault during detention. Speaking to reporters in Paris, she claimed she was slapped, grabbed, and subjected to degrading treatment that left her traumatized.

Italian journalist Alessandro Mantovani described a detention facility made from shipping containers as "a place of terror," alleging that he was beaten by Israeli personnel. British activist Richard Johan Anderson accused Israeli forces of torture and systematic dehumanization, comparing their treatment to the suffering endured daily by Palestinians in Gaza.

Israeli human rights organization Adalah, which represented many detainees, said its lawyers documented numerous allegations of violence and severe injuries. According to the group, at least three activists required hospital treatment. The incident has intensified international criticism of Israel's handling of the flotilla. Earlier this week, more than 20 countries, including the United Kingdom, condemned a video circulated by far-right Israeli minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. The footage showed handcuffed activists kneeling on the floor while being mocked and roughly handled by security personnel.

Even Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticized Ben-Gvir's actions, saying the behaviour shown in the video did not reflect Israel's values. The controversy has further increased international attention on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the growing tensions surrounding attempts to challenge Israel's blockade of the territory. **(Source-David Gritten, BBC News)**