



UNITED NATIONS

Press Release

Gaza: UN Expert denounces seizure of aid boat by Israeli forces

GENEVA - The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Richard Falk, denounced the unlawful naval seizure by an Israeli gunboat on the high seas of a ship carrying medicine and reconstruction material to blockaded people of Gaza.

"This Israeli action implements its cruel blockade of the entire Palestinian population of Gaza, in violation of Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention that prohibits any form of collective punishment directed at an occupied people", said the human rights expert.

Mr. Falk pointed to a recent report on the impact on health resulting from the two year blockade, issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross, stressing that Israeli actions not only restrict such vital supplies as food, medicine, and fuel to bare subsistence levels, but has in unprecedented fashion, disallowed the entry to Gaza of building materials and spare parts needed for repairing some of the widespread damage caused by its attacks on the Strip that took place for 22 days starting on December 27, 2008.

"Such a pattern of continuing blockade under these conditions amounts to such a serious violation of the Geneva Conventions as to constitute a continuing crime against humanity", added the independent human rights expert.

The boat in question had been inspected in response to Israeli demands before departure by the port authorities in Cyprus to determine whether there were weapons on board. None were found, and Israeli authorities were so informed.

Nonetheless, the 21 peace activists on the boat were arrested, held in captivity, and have been charged with 'illegal entry' to Israel even though they had no intention of going to Israel. The group included such prominent figures as the Irish winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Mairead Maguire, and the former American congresswoman Cynthia McKinney.