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## OPT: Aid fleet bound for Gaza

RAMALLAH, 26 May 2010 (IRIN) -- Eight cargo ships with more than 10,000MT of humanitarian aid, mostly building materials, medical equipment and medicines, will set sail for the Gaza Strip on 27 May in a symbolic attempt by activists to break the three-year Israeli blockade, says the Turkish NGO, Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH), local Palestinian NGOs and authorities in Gaza.

Scores of smaller vessels carrying about 750 passengers from an estimated 140 nations are part of the "flotilla", which will attempt to dock in Gaza City on 28 May, said Jamal Al Khoudary, chairman of the Committee to Break the Siege and independent parliament member, in Gaza. Passengers include 50 parliamentary members from the European Union (EU) and Arab nations, and Israeli Knesset member Hanin Zoabi, said Al Khoudary.

Cargo ships originating from several countries, including Algeria, Turkey and Kuwait, are transporting equipment, such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines, unavailable in Gaza, CT scanners, X-ray and kidney dialysis machines, said IHH deputy director Osama Obdo in Gaza. Donors from Greece, Ireland and Sweden contributed to the fleet.

Construction materials include 6,000MT of cement, 6,000MT of concrete and 2,000MT of iron, said Obdo, as well as milk, paper and school supplies.

A [UN Development Programme report](#), released in May said that nearly 16 months after Israel's offensive in Gaza, Operation Cast Lead, almost three-quarters of the damage remains unrepaired due to the blockade.

Israeli foreign affairs ministry spokesperson Yigal Palmor described the fleet as a "publicity stunt".

"International aid organizations and the private sector of Gaza ensure that all the necessary food, medicine and clothing are provided to the Strip via Israel," said Palmor.

Israel says the blockade is necessary to protect Israeli citizens. Israel withdrew militarily from Gaza in September 2005, but retained total control over the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza, according to the World Bank.

"We are monitoring the situation and will act accordingly," an Israeli Defense Force spokesperson told IRIN with regard to the Israeli navy's intentions to stop the fleet.

Turkey, said to be the largest donor to the shipment, has called on Israel to lift its blockade of Gaza and to allow the aid to reach the territory.

Gaza's formal economy has collapsed since the blockade began in June 2007. More than 60 percent of households are food-insecure, according to a joint 25 May statement by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territories, Philippe Lazzarini, humanitarian aid agencies, and the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA).