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Swedes to Istanbul to give witness about abuses against the freedom flotilla in 2010

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Media around the world have reported that the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Hague have decided to investigate the events happening in relation to Israel's military attack against the Freedom Flotilla in May, 2010. However, this is not the only legal process under way at the moment.

Since the end of 2012, four high ranking Israeli military officers are prosecuted in an ongoing trial in Turkey. The Freedom Flotilla, consisting of six vessels with supplies and passengers, including the Swedish and Greek Ship to Gaza vessel 'Sofia', was heading towards the Gaza strip to break the illegal blockade.

The vessels, whose passengers and crew were solely consisting of unarmed civilians, was boarded on international water by Israeli commandos. During the attack, nine humanitarian aid workers were killed on the vessel Mavi Marmara and a great number of passengers were injured. The aid workers were deprived of their liberty, forcefully taken to Israel and then put in Israeli prison. The Israeli soldiers seized the vessels, their cargo and the passengers' personal belongings.

The four prosecuted in Turkey are the former Chief of the General Staff of the Israeli Defence Forces Gabi Ashkenazi, the former Commander of the Israeli Navy Eli Marom, the former head of the military intelligence, Amos Yadlin, and the former Chief of the Air Force Intelligence, Avishai Levi. They are prosecuted for several crimes against Turkish criminal law, including instigating killing, attempt to murder, gross assault, illegal restraint, hijack, pillage and gross property damage.

After being postponed due to legal advising for the prosecuted, the main hearing is resumed today, May 20-21. In connection to this, the Ship to Gaza Sweden spokespersons Victoria Strand and Dror Feiler go to Istanbul, together with Member of the Swedish Parliament Mehmet Kaplan (Green Party), to give witness of their experiences and observations during the boarding.

Victoria Strand states that she wants to speak about the treatment of the passengers that were not on the Mavi Marmara.

- It was an international convoy that was stricken with crime and abuse. Soldiers in disguise took control of our boat and shot several passengers with stun guns and rubber-coated bullets. We were captured and taken to Israel against our will, where we were accused of trying to enter Israel illegally.

When arriving in Sweden, after the attack in 2010, Victoria termed the episode armed robbery, since the Israeli soldiers took all of the passengers' belongings. The majority of these belongings were never returned.

The prosecuted military officers can't be judged in their absence. However, there is hope that an international arrest warrant will be issued in order to get them extradited to Turkey. Many countries are obligated to obey such an arrest warrant, and therefore obligated to arrest the prosecuted if they are residing within the country's jurisdiction. Legal investigations have been undertaken in Spain, Belgium and South Africa as well.

- Thus, the trial is important in terms of opinion making as well as in its concrete results, Victoria Strand says.

Dror Feiler will be lecturing in an Istanbul University about Ship to Gaza Sweden and the view on the blockade in the Nordic Countries. He has already given evidence in the ongoing trial about how he was battered by Israeli soldiers and got his camera, cell phone, saxophone, money and jewelry stolen.

However, he is hoping to be allowed to give witness a second time. Political forces in both Turkey and Israel that used to have strong ties want to stop the trial. Especially since Israel recently apologized for the boarding and promised to compensate the families of the nine aid workers that were killed. Demanding testimonials from the many international passengers from the flotilla vessels is therefore a way of showing that the attack was not just a concern for the Turkish people, but that there are victims of crime all over the world that demand justice.

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Links

[1] https://shiptogaza.se/sites/default/files/newsImages/israeli_assault_on_mavi_marmara_1_0.jpg

[2] <https://shiptogaza.se/print/1412>

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