

Spanish police assault Gaza flotilla activists

Cerie Bullivant, a Palestine solidarity activist who sailed on the Gaza Sumud Flotilla and endured vicious abuse at the hands of Israeli forces, discusses the beating of fellow passengers who returned home to Bilbao, Spain, and the overall contempt European governments demonstrated for their own citizens who attempted to break the siege of Gaza. ||| The Grayzone ||| Find more reporting at <https://thegrayzone.com> Support our original journalism at Patreon: <https://patreon.com/grayzone> Facebook: <https://facebook.com/thegrayzone> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/thegrayzonenews> Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thegrayzonenews> Minds: <https://minds.com/thegrayzone> Mastodon: <https://mastodon.social/@thegrayzone> #TheGrayzone

#Max

It is interesting to see how increasingly isolated the UK is and how the flotilla forced this issue. This is Giorgia Meloni, the Italian prime minister. The images of Ben-Gvir are unacceptable. It's inadmissible that these demonstrators are subjected to this treatment that violates human dignity. And she summoned the Israeli ambassador and demanded an apology, a formal apology from Israel. Many other European states, I think France also, summoned Israeli ambassadors. I think the UK summoned the ambassador, but it was a much more calmly worded, clinically worded tweet. Meloni has previously condemned the flotilla. There are many, many Italian citizens who go on these and help coordinate them. So, you know, there's much more pressure on her to condemn it. And this, to me, represents something of a diplomatic shift that could—do you think this could lead to any concrete change in policy from the non-Commonwealth European states?

#Cerie Bullivant

I mean, I really hope so. Ireland was very close to bringing in a law that would have applied full sanctions on Israel, even though if they had done so, they would have been in breach of EU law and would have been fined a million pounds a day for taking those sanctions. But they were still within, like, five or six votes of applying those sanctions and taking the fine anyway.

#Max

So the EU will fine you a million pounds a day if you sanction Israel?

#Cerie Bullivant

Without the full cooperation of the EU. So for a country to do it independently, that would be a breach of EU law. But even with that, the Irish parliament were very, very close to passing the sanctions anyway and saying, basically, fine us if you like. I'll say this about the consulate staff.

When we arrived in Turkey after, like, four days of horrific torture, I went to the British consulate staff and told them that I'd witnessed a sexual assault and needed to give them a statement about that, and that this was a very important matter. And three times they said, yeah, you know, that's really, really important, and then walked away. I had to go up to them three times and tried to raise this issue with them, and three times they walked away without taking a statement and basically refused to do anything.

As we went to the medical center afterwards, where people were getting their wounds checked and everything officially taken down for all of the results of the torture, there were Irish, there were German, there were Belgian consulate staff there till 3 o'clock in the morning. I literally saw them with my own eyes. The Brits were gone from the center within the first hour. They didn't even go to the health center. They just left the airport. So this was the quality of the response from the British consulate. And honestly, I've come to expect no better from them. The Irish consulate were telling me I need to pull my finger out and get an Irish passport because my family are originally Irish. And then they were like, then we can come and help you as well. I was like, if ever there was a strong argument for doing that, now's the time.

#Max

Yeah, I was reading a testimony from a Kiwi activist from New Zealand who is actually Māori and said that he was brutalized, brutally beaten. They threatened to throw him in a room with dogs to be tortured. He witnessed many of the horrors that you did. And then upon return to Auckland, they were not received by anyone. There was simply no government support for them. Complete silence about what took place there. In Australia, we saw a Green member of parliament speak up about the sexual assault and torture. But, you know, Labor was pretty silent.

#Cerie Bullivant

I can go one up on that New Zealand case. As we arrived in the UK, the British delegation there had a press conference organized in a hotel next door, and the police went and threatened the hotel that if they allowed them to do the press conference, they would bring problems for them using Prevent legislation, saying that it would be radicalizing. And so we had to go and do the press conference out in a field not too far away from the airport because the hotel where we had booked was basically intimidated by the British police to not even allow us to have the press conference there. That is insane. That's incredible. Welcome to the home of democracy and free speech.

#Max

Yeah, yeah, the Westphalian values are increasingly looking like Israeli values in the UK. This is how activists were received in Bilbao, Spain, by Basque police, and I want you to address this as well. This was pretty wild.

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They're still wearing the sweatsuits that you were put in in prison, the ones you see so many prisoners coming out of Gaza wearing.

#Cerie Bullivant

This is really hard for me to watch because I was in the cells with a lot of these people. I mean, they're really brave, wonderful people. They're Spanish police, wonderful captains.

#Max

Why are they beating them?

#Cerie Bullivant

They just walked out of the airport. What? So, to my understanding, even though the Spanish government is generally pretty positive on the issue of Palestine, a lot of these activists are from the Catalan region. And so, because they support Catalan independence, that's why the Basque police came at them like this. A lot of the sailors and the skippers were Spanish because the flotilla actually began in Barcelona.

#Max

So would you say Pedro Sánchez has been one of the most outspoken European leaders, Western leaders condemning what Israel's been doing in Gaza, its attacks on Iran, but he was essentially green-lighting this treatment of these activists because of their affiliation with the Catalan independence movement?

#Cerie Bullivant

That's my understanding. But unfortunately, you know, in my experience, cops lean into fascism all too quickly. Yeah, and are often sort of like a rule unto themselves, even if their politicians might have different positions. Yeah, I think there's a lot of local politics that's just going on there in that scene. Yeah, it's really hard for me to watch because, like, they literally just came from being beaten and battered and abused in similar ways by the Israelis, and then they come home and their own country does the same thing. Yeah, I mean, that was...

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Just kind of shocking to me. And I saw the Israeli foreign ministry promote it and say, oh, we condemn this, and, you know, basically to say we're not the only ones, and actually your own

governments are worse, which was extremely cynical, but typical of them—just as typical as them condemning the UN for placing Israel on a blacklist of nations that practice sexual abuse on a systematic scale in their prisons, when they had lobbied the UN in that very body to place Hamas on that blacklist. So they said the UN has no validity, this is a fake body, but they were lobbying that same body back in—starting in 2023. Just everything they do is completely cynical.

#Cerie Bullivant

Yeah. Rules for thee, not for me. And this has been the operating procedure for Israel for as long as I've followed this conflict. And, you know, I remember being a kid and my mom explaining to me—my mother had spent time in the West Bank before I was even born, working with Palestinian organizations and groups. And yeah, this is a story that, as we said at the beginning, has been going on for 75 years, from before either of us were twinkles in the eyes of our parents.

#Max

Indeed. So where does the—I mean, you're still working on the flotilla. Yeah, yeah. What's next?

#Cerie Bullivant

So what's next is—actually, I can send it to you as well. I've got footage of our boat that was scuppered and sunk. And one of the other boats managed to get back to it as it was sinking and get some footage of that, which I can send to you. I don't think it's been made public.

#Max

Yeah.

#Cerie Bullivant

But what's next for us is I'm going to be doing a range of talks across Europe with comrades, at mosques, with as many people as I can, trying to explain what happened. One of the other objectives of this flotilla was to create first-hand witnesses who can speak from personal experience about what had happened. And so we have a duty to the people of Gaza to keep speaking out and to keep working on this issue. So as we do those events, we'll hopefully be raising money for more boats and a bigger flotilla. The last flotilla that went was about 40 boats. This one was 82 boats. So hopefully the next one will be 120, 150 boats. And we will come back with numbers until we get that aid through to Gaza.

#Max

We need to do more to draw attention to the fact that there are over 8,000 Palestinian hostages being tortured right now. And, you know, in the United States, we look at the civil rights protesters who crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge and were beaten with truncheons, who were beaten at Woolworth's lunch counters, who were hosed down by Bull Connor protesting segregation in the Jim Crow South as heroes. The Democratic Party fetishizes them.

These activists, what they are doing, putting their bodies on the line against the modern-day Nazis in Tel Aviv who are holding millions of people alive in open-air prisons, destroying their cities, still subjecting them to genocide. What they are doing is no less heroic, and they're taking an even greater risk to their lives, confronting a military that kills civilians for sport. These are the heroes of our time. And one day we will look at them the same way we looked at the civil rights protesters who are now held up as the icons of the Democratic Party that still supports this apartheid state.