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**Press Briefing by
Israel Navy Deputy Commander, Rear Admiral Rani Ben-Yehuda:
The Navy's Activity in Seizing the Iranian Arms Ship**

Oren Weigenfeld: Now we will be briefed by the chief of the Israeli naval fleet, Rear Admiral Rani Ben-Yehuda.

Rear Adm. Ben-Yehuda: I will not focus exactly on what we found because you will see it for yourselves when you get to the platform. You will also see the quantities and the various types of weaponry found.

Yesterday evening, on a routine security patrol – one of the long-distance patrols carried out on a daily basis by missile boats and patrol planes, a ship was discovered on its way from the Damietta port to the Limassol port in Cypress. The ship was questioned by the missile boats, as a completely routine activity done by us as well as NATO forces, American forces and UNIFIL forces who operate here on a regular basis. This interrogation included a request to board the ship to perform a somewhat more thorough check onboard. The request was passed on to the ship's captain. He granted permission for the naval forces to board the ship. We quickly got organized to do so.

A special naval commando force prepared itself for this operation, along with the missile boats. They reached the ship and boarded it with absolutely no use of force and with the cooperation of the ship's crew, and performed their routine inspection of the ship's manifest. The documents revealed that there were a number of containers on board on their way from Iran to Syria. We inspected a sampling of some of the containers and in some of them discovered various weapons in very large quantities. They were disguised as ordinary civilian cargo. When we get to the platform you will immediately see how the arms were camouflaged inside the containers.

After it became clear that there were large quantities of ammunitions, missiles, and rockets on board the ship, we informed the captain and all the authorities that have any connection to the ship – the country whose flag the ship was flying, the country operating the ship, and other bodies we deemed proper to inform them that we intended to dock the ship at the port of Ashdod for a thorough search.

We brought the ship in this morning, after preparing ourselves along with other forces, and began unloading the ship. We carried out an inspection and found dozens of containers with hundreds of tons of arms bound for Hezbollah from Iran. We have no doubt, and you will see it too, that these weapons are for purposes of terror. When you see the nature of these weapons, what they're used for and the quantities, you'll understand that these arms are intended for terror. We have no doubt that that they originated in Iran and their final destination, via Syria, is Hezbollah.

We are sure that the ship's crew knew nothing about the cargo; they had no idea what they were carrying. And we are sure that everywhere this ship went with these containers, and they were in a number of ports, they actually jeopardized innocent people and ships, since they handled the containers like regular cargo with no distinction or recognition that they need to be handled gently because they're full of weapons.

So these containers disguised as civilian cargo were making their way to Syria and would then reach Hezbollah. This is the third time this year that we see how Iran spurns international law and UN resolution 1747 which prohibits it from all activity supplying or transferring arms to any state, of course including the state meant to receive these arms, due to the endangerment of innocents aboard the ship and at the ports when this cargo is unloaded and then loaded onto other ships. And of course its ultimate goal was to create additional striking balance and threat of terror on the citizens of Israel. You will see the amounts. I think that once you see these sights, it will be unnecessary for us to say anything more about quantities.

I want to reiterate that this activity is carried out regularly along the borders of the country and in long-distance patrols by the naval forces with patrol boats, missile boats, naval commandos and air patrols, on a regular, daily basis. These preliminary inquiries take place almost every day. We decide to board the vessel for a search every time we see a need for it according to international law, with full backup. And we are not the only ones who do this. Thousands of preliminary inquiries take place on commercial ships by NATO forces and UNIFIL forces in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea. Hundreds of searches take place aboard ships to examine the cargo. Our soldiers showed great resolve – they kept searching and delving even though the cargo was disguised as civilian goods, and they discovered this cargo.

Q: There was also advance intelligence so they were monitoring...

Rear Adm. Ben- Yehuda: We receive continuous intelligence and constant reports that Iran is consistently supporting and massively arming Hezbollah and other organizations against us. We know this isn't the first instance. Just this year there were two other ships like this stopped by NATO, the Monchegorsk which you've all heard of, in January, and another ship in September. It's clear to us what's going on; it's no surprise. Unfortunately I must say that what we found is just a drop in the bucket. To get an idea, understand that this is ten

times more than the cargo on the Karine-A, when everyone was so appalled by its magnitude.

Q: Could you specify what exactly was on the ship?

Rear Adm. Ben-Yehuda: There were 122 mm rockets, which in terms of ranges and quantities are clearly arms of terror and bound for Hezbollah. There were other rockets, mortars and grenades, in tremendous quantities. You'll see it all for yourselves; there's no point in my elaborating on this.

Q: Were there advanced anti-aircraft systems?

Rear Adm. Ben-Yehuda: We're still in the process of opening the containers. So far we have unloaded about a third of the containers and no such systems have been found. But we found very high quality weapons in enormous amounts, reaching dozens. Close to 40 containers. So far we haven't found anti-aircraft missiles but we haven't unloaded everything. This process is in full force.

Q: The Egyptian port...

Rear Adm. Ben-Yehuda: It was seen as innocent cargo in the Egyptian port. We have no suspicion or fear that the Egyptians were aware of it. Again, that was another port where innocent people were endangered because they treated it as routine cargo whereas it is actually explosive and dangerous.

Q: Regarding the intelligence, although you answered, it was not completely clear. Did you approach this ship also based on specific intelligence, not just generally but more individually?

Rear Adm. Ben-Yehuda: I gave my answer. We get a great deal of ongoing intelligence about Iran's activity in support of terror organizations and its disregard...we're talking about smuggling here but this smuggling is actually being carried out by a nation with well-oiled mechanisms to camouflage weapons as civilian cargo in opposition to a Security Council resolution and to the endangerment of innocent vessels. Think what happens if such a cargo detonates because it is not being handled like the volatile cargo it is. This is simply a country that scorns every principle and law, and jeopardizes innocent people in order to ship arms to strike at the State of Israel.

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