

**2 Jun 2010**

**Statement by Prime Minister Netanyahu  
“No Love Boat”**

Once again, Israel faces hypocrisy and a biased rush to judgment. I'm afraid this isn't the first time.

Last year, Israel acted to stop Hamas from firing thousands of rockets into Israel's towns and cities. Hamas was firing on our civilians while hiding behind civilians. And Israel went to unprecedented lengths to avoid Palestinian civilian casualties. Yet it was Israel, and not Hamas, that was accused by the UN of war crimes.

Now regrettably, the same thing appears to be happening now.

But here are the facts. Hamas is smuggling thousands of Iranian rockets, missiles and other weaponry – smuggling it into Gaza in order to fire on Israel's cities. These missiles can reach Ashdod and Beer Sheva – these are major Israeli cities. And I regret to say that some of them can reach now Tel Aviv, and very soon, the outskirts of Jerusalem. From the information we have, the planned shipments include weapons that can reach farther, even farther and deeper into Israel.

Under international law, and under common sense and common decency, Israel has every right to interdict this weaponry and to inspect the ships that might be transporting them.

This is not a theoretical challenge or a theoretical threat. We have already interdicted vessels bound for Hezbollah, and for Hamas from Iran, containing hundreds of tons of weapons. In one ship, the *Francop*, we found hundreds of tons of war materiel and weapons destined for Hezbollah. In another celebrated case, the *Karine A*, dozens of tons of weapons were destined for Hamas by Iran via a shipment to Gaza. Israel simply cannot permit the free flow of weapons and war materials to Hamas from the sea.

I will go further than that. Israel cannot permit Iran to establish a Mediterranean port a few dozen kilometers from Tel Aviv and from Jerusalem. And I would go beyond that too. I say to the responsible leaders of all the nations: The international community cannot afford an Iranian port in the Mediterranean. Fifteen years ago I cautioned about an Iranian development that has come to pass – people now recognize that danger. Today I warn of this impending willingness to enable Iran to establish a naval port right next to Israel, right next to Europe. The same countries that are criticizing us today should know that they will be targeted tomorrow.

For this and for many other reasons, we have a right to inspect cargo heading into Gaza.

And here's our policy. It's very simple: Humanitarian and other goods can go in and weapons and war materiel cannot.

And we do let civilian goods into Gaza. There is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Each week, an average of ten thousand tons of goods enter Gaza. There's no shortage of food. There's no shortage of medicine. There's no shortage of other goods.

On this occasion too, we made several offers – offers to deliver the goods on board the flotilla to Gaza after a security inspection. Egypt made similar offers. And these offers were rejected time and again.

So our naval personnel had no choice but to board these vessels. Now, on five of the vessels, our seamen were not met by any serious violence and as a result, there were no serious injuries aboard those ships. But on the largest ship, something very different happened.

Our naval personnel, just as they landed on the ship – you can see this in the videos – the first soldier – they were met with a vicious mob. They were stabbed, they were clubbed, they were fired upon. I talked to some of these soldiers. One was shot in the stomach, one was shot in the knee. They were going to be killed and they had to act in self-defense.

It is very clear to us that the attackers had prepared their violent action in advance. They were members of an extremist group that has supported international terrorist organizations and today support the terrorist organization called Hamas. They brought with them in advance knives, steel rods, other weapons. They chanted battle cries against the Jews. You can hear this on the tapes that have been released.

This was not a love boat. This was a hate boat. These weren't pacifists. These weren't peace activists. These were violent supporters of terrorism.

I think that the evidence that the lives of the Israeli seamen were in danger is crystal clear. If you're a fair-minded observer and you look at those videos, you know this simple truth. But I regret to say that for many in the international community, no evidence is needed. Israel is guilty until proven guilty.

Once again, Israel is told that it has a right to defend itself but is condemned every time it exercises that right. Now you know that a right that you cannot exercise is meaningless. And you know that the way we exercise it – under these conditions of duress, under the rocketing of our cities, under the impending killing of our soldiers – you know that we exercise it in a way that is commensurate with any international standard. I have spoken to leading leaders of the world, and I say the same thing today to the international community: What would you do? How would you stop thousands of rockets that are destined to attack your cities, your civilians, your children? How would your soldiers behave under similar circumstances? I think in your hearts, you all know the truth.

Israel regrets the loss of life. But we will never apologize for defending ourselves. Israel has every right to prevent deadly weapons from entering into hostile territory. And Israeli soldiers have every right to defend their lives and their country.

This may sound like an impossible plea, or an impossible request, or an impossible demand, but I make it anyway: Israel should not be held to a double standard. The Jewish state has a right to defend itself just like any other state.

Thank you.