

ARREST – NOW

An international delegation of activists was arrested yesterday morning by Israeli police for attempting to cut through the Gaza barrier fence and break the siege.

The group, Gaza 2020 Breaking the Siege, which includes Finnish politician Anna Kontula are **demanding the international community end its silence on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which is a direct result of Israel's 13-year blockade.**

Ms Kontula, a sociologist and member of the Finish Parliament since 2011, along with British, Austrian, and Danish activists, were arrested en route to Gaza at 7am (GMT), January 14. They were held for over 10 hours at the Ofakim police station in the south of Israel, and interrogated. The activists were told by officers that secret services had been aware of the action from tapping their phones.

They were later released at around 7:40pm (GMT), and banned from entering the south of Israel. Two activists were also arrested on Thursday, January 9, at the Gaza fence. The two were taken to Ofakim prison and held overnight. They were released the next morning but police refused to hand back their phones and passports.

In both cases the activists had intended to cut the fortified border fence and enter Gaza in a forceful but symbolic action to **demand an immediate end to the Israeli land, sea and air blockade**, which began in 2007 and continues to this day.

Gaza2020: Breaking the Siege's **unprecedented attempt** is part of an international movement to break the siege of the strip, inspired by the Free Gaza Movement, which has challenged the Israeli naval blockade by sending dozens of boats carrying aid to Gaza.

In just 13 years Gaza has been rendered virtually uninhabitable as a result of the blockade, with its close to two million inhabitants suffering from chronic shortages of food, water, and medical supplies, rationed power supplies, limited access to medical care, increasing desertification, severe water and air pollution, overpopulation and Israeli airstrikes and military incursions.

The rapid destruction of Gaza was entirely foreseeable. The UN predicted in 2012 that the Strip would become uninhabitable by 2020. 96% of aquifer water is undrinkable, 50% of Gazans are unemployed and one fifth of homes are still unusable six years after the 2014 Israeli invasion of Gaza. The cataclysmic situation is expected to worsen significantly, as **the Israeli government has shown no signs of lifting the blockade** or restraining from indiscriminate deadly attacks and is now in the process of building another wall around Gaza. The new barrier will tower 6 meters high and reach deep below ground, isolating Gaza even further. In September, Israeli media reported the wall was 70% complete.

Since March 30 2018, thousands of protesters have gathered weekly at the Israeli barrier

separating Gaza from the historic lands seized by Israel since 1948. The Great March of Return protesters are demanding both an end to the Israeli siege and the right to return for refugees forced from their homes by Israeli forces in 1948 and 1967. **Israeli forces have killed 215 participants in these protests, including 47 children.** Despite this, the international community still refuses to take measures to pressure Israel to lift the siege and end the artificially created humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The people of Gaza cannot live another year under siege. It's no longer a matter of time running out. Time has already run out.

Gaza2020: Breaking the Siege said: *"Yesterday's action was the first attempt to break the siege, in solidarity with the people of Gaza. We want Gazans to know that we will not give up, that we will continue opposing this illegal and barbaric siege of innocent people."*

Updates and further information will be posted regularly on Gaza 2020:Breaking the Siege's [Twitter](#), [Youtube](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) .

Anna Kontula, an MP in the Finland parliament and sociologist said: *"I'm participating in the action because the situation in Gaza is awful and needs the world's attention. During the last decade illegal occupation policy has caused deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Now Israel is building a wall around Gaza. When it's ready, two million people - half of them children - will be totally locked in. It's like a prison, except that in my country prisoners are more food and better health care than the children in Gaza. And of course they can get out some day."*

British citizen who prefers to be named as Julia Lister, 26, a teacher and photographer, said: *"In what world can an occupying military force trap nearly 2 million people (70% of whom are refugees) in an open air prison of 360km, target unarmed civilians, journalists and medics and bomb the homes of children whilst claiming their state is the 'only democracy in the Middle East' with the 'most moral army in the world'. The UN, governments worldwide and countless international human rights organisations routinely condemn Israel but this does not seem to be enough: nothing is changing and the people of Gaza continue to suffer."*

Austrian citizen Lisa Duscheck, 28, who is a entrepreneur and activist in multiple

organisations in her home country, said: *“What I have experienced when talking to people in my and other countries is either complete oblivious to this humanitarian crisis or a lot of excuses and justification for something that shouldn't and can't be justified. This is why I am a part of an international delegation to break the siege of Gaza by cutting the fence.”*

Danish citizen, Mads Gram, a kindergarten teacher and poet, said: *“Since 2018, the civilian population of Gaza has been mobilising and in great numbers marched on the fences surrounding Gaza; demanding an end to the Israeli siege and the right of return... they have been met with incredible violence from the Israeli military and put their lives at risk. It is time that the world shows solidarity. I am joining this action to support the struggle of the people in Gaza and all of Palestine and show them that somebody is willing to stand for them.”*

Messages from Gazan activists:

Haidar Eid, a BDS activist and academic from Gaza, said: *“The crippling Israeli siege has shattered all spheres of life. This siege is about getting rid of Gazans since most of them are refugees who have not forgotten about their internationally-stipulated right of return. Make their life as harsh as possible so that they either die of starvation and disease, or leave in search of a better life somewhere else. This is why this action is so important since the international community has failed us by doing absolutely nothing. It is left to ordinary people of conscience to help break the siege.”*

Ahmed Abu Artema, a journalist and activist from Gaza, said: *“With the beginning of this new year Gaza has become officially unlivable place according to the UN reports. Israel worked systemically along the last 13 years to undermine the conditions of the life of 2.2 million Palestinians who live in this narrow and besieged place. Gaza needs the efforts of all the people who believe in justice and freedom for everyone to make pressure against the state of Israeli Apartheid to end the policy of the collective punishments against the civilians. We appreciate this action which aim to bring the attention for the people who suffers and struggles in the same time for freedom.”*

For more information and to arrange interviews with delegates contact:

For English inquiries: +44 786 4720511
+49 178 8585728

For Spanish inquiries: +49 178 8585728

For Chinese inquiries: +49 178 8585728

Notes and Links

- The Gaza blockade (through the land, air and sea) is a denial of basic human rights in contravention of international law and amounts to collective punishment, as stated by the UN. It severely restricts imports and exports, as well as the movement of people in and out of Gaza, and access to agricultural land and fishing waters.
- Palestinian Center for Human Rights Reports on the Great March of Return protests - <https://pchgaza.org/en/?cat=64>
- UN Resolution Resolution 1860 (2009), which calls for the lifting of the blockade and access to “humanitarian assistance”
<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/96514396E8389A2C852575390051D574>
- UNOCHA: Gaza Strip electricity supply
<https://www.ochaopt.org/page/gaza-strip-electricity-supply>
- UNOCHA: Humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip Fast facts – OCHA factsheet
<https://www.un.org/unispal/humanitarian-situation-in-the-gaza-strip-fast-facts-ocha-factsheet/>
- UNOCHA: The Gaza Strip: The Humanitarian Impact of the Blockade
<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/gaza-strip-humanitarian-impact-blockade-november-2016>
- UN: Gaza may be “unlivable by 2020”
<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/gaza-unliveable-un-special-rapporteur-for-the-situation-of-human-rights-in-the-opt-tells-third-committee-press-release-excerpts/>