

GIU LE MANI DA GAZA, PALESTINA LIBERA - HANDS OFF GAZA, FREE PALESTINE



On 1st June the Madleen, part of the @gazafreedomflotilla set sail from the small picturesque fishing port of Li Cuti, Catania to Gaza in a courageous attempt to break the genocidal siege imposed on the people of Palestine by the barbaric government of Israel.

It is fair to say that, initially, in Catania, public response to the systematic ethnic cleansing and collective punishment of the Palestinians in Gaza was slow. Support for Palestine has been greatly galvanised by activist groups in the past year or so and there are now regular large scale manifestations. Most recently, on 25 May, an estimated 5000 demonstrators turned out to march alongside members of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition. This '*corteo*', procession, took over *via Etnea*, Catania's Oxford Street, leaving from the Bellini Gardens and gathering at *Piazza Università*. The population of Catania roughly accords with that of Edinburgh. It is inspiring to observe demonstrators grow exponentially. These marches mobilise and comprise refugees, migrant workers, the undocumented and the marginalised populations expressing uplifting support for the Palestinian people, in solidarity with the local activist citizenry.

I write this on the eve of a hard-won referendum about to take place on 8 and 9 June in Italy, seeking to reform workers rights and ameliorate the right to Italian citizenship. Many individuals and families resident in Italy, languish in an uncertain and vulnerable limbo due to Italy's punitive, discriminatory, bureaucracy.

Currently, people must be resident in Italy for at least 10 years before being able to apply for citizenship. Endless hurdles and bureaucratic incompetence (like losing documents) pose almost insurmountable obstacles. And should citizenship be granted, this does not automatically extend from the parent to the child.

It is against this political backdrop that 3 days of inspiring and enlightening events unfolded in Catania prior to the Madleen setting sail for Gaza. It is important to touch upon the history of the Freedom Flotilla. On May 31 2010 nine humanitarian volunteers were killed when Israeli commandos attacked the *Mavi Marmara*, the largest ship that formed part of a flotilla carrying humanitarian aid and Turkish activists to Gaza. Only last month, another ship, *Conscience*, was attacked by drones, setting the engine ablaze and blowing a hole in the boat rendering it inoperative. The Madleen carries this noble legacy forward.

On May 30 open air panel discussions were convened at Li Cuti, overlooking the Ionian Sea with the Madleen anchored in the background. One of the sessions was devoted to *Genocide*, another to *Complicity* and we heard from distinguished international activists and artists.

Some of the stand out contributors included **Ann Wright**, a former U.S. Army Colonel and Diplomat who resigned her office on the eve of the war on Iraq. Ann was aboard a sister ship when the *Mavi Marmara* was attacked. She bore powerful witness to these murderous events inflicted upon innocent humanitarian activists by the Israeli government. This kind of personal testimony was a powerful and moving feature of many of the contributions. They brought the life and death realities confronting the people of Gaza to the fore going way beyond statistics as harrowing as these are.

Another panelist was the British-Australian doctor, **Dr Mohammad Mustafa**, who had flown from Australia to attend and contribute to the launch and pre-launch discussions. He is renowned for the work he has carried out during two missions working in the emergency department at the *al-Ahli Arab* hospital, at the time, the last fully functioning hospital in Gaza, prior to the Israeli bombardment of that hospital. Without providing evidence, the Israeli army claimed it was being used as a command and control centre. Dr Mohammad gave sober testimony, communicating the unthinkable. He spoke with quiet compassion and great humility, describing having to decide between which limbless child to work on and which would be left, helpless and ultimately lifeless, in a pool of their own blood. He told of saving the lives of children in the emergency department only to lose them days later due to the unavailability of basic life-saving antibiotics. For him, being forever suspended between hope and despair was the condition of life in Gaza. He spoke lovingly of the people of Gaza.

The Irish actor **Liam Cunningham** talked with fierce passion of the Gaza genocide in relation to other colonial struggles, in particular, that between Britain and Ireland. He referenced eight international Genocide experts, recently consulted by a Dutch media outlet, all of whom concurred that this is, indisputably, a genocide or at the very least, represents genocidal intent and genocidal violence. He praised all of the ordinary people, local and international who gave support to and enabled the Madleen mission.

Finally, and the testimony that most moved me and will stay with me always was the image so eloquently articulated by a **Trauma Paramedic**. She relayed the story of 5 men who had gone to buy bread for their families. For this 'crime' they were shot dead by Israeli forces on the doorsteps of their homes. She spoke of carrying a young girl to safety and of feeling her greatly accelerated heartbeat thud against her own heart. Apparently many terrified and traumatised children suffer fatal heart attacks due to the sheer terror to which they are subjected. They are simply overwhelmed by fear.

This only touches upon the many presentations by international activists and their allies gathered in solidarity in Catania to wish the Madleen safe passage. Simply being present was an honour and a transformation.



Rompere l'assedio! Break the Siege!

- Jim Mooney
Catania
6.6.2025