

Beat: News

Israeli Navy boards pro-Palestinian activist ship off Gaza

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USPA News - The Israeli Navy on Saturday boarded and seized a pro-Palestinian activist ship on the Mediterranean high seas to prevent it from breaking Israel's maritime blockade of the Gaza Strip, a military spokesperson said. The vessel was later directed to the port of Ashdod.

The Swedish-owned, Finnish-flagged boat SV Estelle, a three-mast schooner, left the Italian city of Naples on October 7 with about 30 people from eight countries, including Norway, Sweden, Greece, Spain, Israel, and Canada. Organizers said the vessel was carrying humanitarian cargo such as cement and children's books. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said it boarded the vessel after numerous calls were made to the passengers on board. "As a result of their unwillingness to cooperate and after ignoring calls to change course, the decision was made to board the vessel and lead it to the port of Ashdod," a military spokesperson said. Earlier, Dror Feiler, a spokesman for the Stockholm-based organization Ship to Gaza Sweden, said SV Estelle was being "attacked" in international waters. "Five or six military vessels surrounded Estelle," he said. "Soldiers wearing masks are now trying to board the ship. The attack took place on international waters: N31 26 E33 45." The Israeli military, meanwhile, insisted its soldiers operated as planned and took every precaution necessary to ensure the safety of the passengers. "After boarding the vessel by IDF soldiers, who did not need to use force, the passengers were attended to and offered food and beverages," the spokesperson added. After the vessel arrived at the Ashdod port, the passengers were transferred to the custody of Israel Police and immigration authorities at the Ministry of Interior. The spokesperson added that any organization or state which wants to transfer supplies or aid to the Gaza Strip can do so via existing land crossings in coordination with Israeli authorities. In May 2010, nine pro-Palestinian activists were killed and dozens more were injured when Israeli commandos boarded a ship participating in the 'Freedom Flotilla I', which was heading to the Gaza Strip with humanitarian aid on board. The incident caused global outrage over alleged excessive force, but Israel has denied such allegations and said its commandos were being attacked. Following the incident, Turkey withdrew its Ambassador to Israel and suspended joint military exercises, as well as banning any Israeli military aircraft from entering its national airspace. The most recent flotilla attempt in November 2011 also failed to reach Gaza shores after Israeli soldiers boarded the vessels and directed them to Ashdod.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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