



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **FREE GAZA & LIBERTY TO LEAVE GAZA PORT ON THURSDAY**

For More Information, Please Contact:

(Gaza) Paul Larudee: +972 598 765 370

(Gaza) Huwaida Arraf: +972 599 130 426

(Cyprus) Osama Qashoo: +357 97 793 595 / osamaqashoo@gmail.com

(Jerusalem) Angela Godfrey-Goldstein: +972 547 366 393 / angela@icahd.org

(GAZA CITY, 26 August 2008) – The FREE GAZA and LIBERTY will leave Gaza for Cyprus on Thursday morning at 9:00 am. Several Palestinian students who have been denied exit visas by Israel will travel to Cyprus on the boats. One Palestinian professor will finally be able to go back to teaching in Europe and one young Palestinian woman will finally be reunited with her husband. Several of the Free Gaza international human rights workers will remain in Gaza to do human rights monitoring.

By freely traveling to Gaza, on Saturday, August 23rd, in two small wooden boats, the Free Gaza Movement forced the Israeli government to issue a fundamental policy change regarding their military and economic blockade of Gaza. Until now, Israel has wanted absolute control of Gaza with no responsibility. Israel has managed to maintain this situation, in spite of international law, because its policies have never been challenged.

When the FREE GAZA and LIBERTY approached the waters of Gaza, the Israeli government had to decide whether it wanted to publicly acknowledge that Israel remains an occupying power in Gaza, in which case Israel would be responsible under international law for its actions, including war crimes. In the face of intense, public scrutiny, Israel instead chose to acknowledge the inherent right of Palestinians to freely engage with the world. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign affairs publicly announced that humanitarian and human rights missions to Gaza will no longer be stopped or threatened by Israel. With the end of the Israeli siege of Gaza, Palestinians are free to exercise their rights without fear of being stopped or killed by the Israeli military.

Since the organizers of the Free Gaza Movement will not be entering Israeli territorial waters, and since they will request an inspection from the Gaza Port Authority, they expect no interference on the part of the Israeli authorities when they leave Gaza. By Israel's own admission, it has no authority to inspect the boats or the passengers when they leave Gaza.

With the collapse of the Israeli blockade, the Free Gaza Movement will quickly return to Gaza with another delegation, and invites the United Nations, Arab League and international community to organize similar human rights and humanitarian efforts. The Free Gaza Movement will continue to work to ensure the free passage between Gaza and the outside world will remain safe and open.

###