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The Lesson of the Flotilla Bloodbath: End the Occupation

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Position paper of WAC-MAAN about the deaths on the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza

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WAC-MAAN, which organizes within its ranks both Jewish and Arab workers, strongly condemns the Israeli raid on the Freedom for Gaza flotilla, which has resulted in nine dead and dozens of wounded.

Israel's attempt to divert the argument away from its blockade on Gaza, and over to the resistance that its troops encountered while attacking the flotilla, is futile and grotesque. As if soldiers sent to prevent civilians from breaking an unjust siege can be compared with 1.5 million Palestinians caught in a three-year humanitarian catastrophe!

WAC holds that Israel's stubbornness, and its refusal to pay the price of peace—namely, an end to the occupation and recognition of the Palestinian people's right to a sovereign state—is the main reason for the continuing bloodshed. In its suffering, the Palestinian people's cause has become the banner of the international community.

The international community agrees on the need to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by an Israeli withdrawal and the implementation of UN resolutions. Nevertheless, the powers that pull the strings in the region continue to put their narrow interests first. The American administration under Barack Obama at first proposed to bring about a dramatic change in American policy, but in effect it continues to support an axis of corrupt, dictatorial regimes. In the Palestinian arena, it deepens the schism between Fatah and Hamas by strengthening the regime of Abu Mazen and Salam Fayyad.

As for Hamas, which rules Gaza, it shows no concern for the real situation of the Palestinian people. Relying on support from Iran, it opts for total struggle against Israel and the pro-American regimes. In the view of the Iran-Hezbollah-Hamas axis, the campaign to remove the siege of Gaza translates into proof of the rightness of their cause.

Israel has exploited the situation, postponing a solution to the conflict with the excuse that there is no partner for peace. The right-wing Netanyahu government refuses to make progress in negotiations, opposing any arrangement based on withdrawal to the 1967 borders and recognition of Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem. Seventeen years after signing the Oslo Accords, Israeli governments continue to act as if the bloody struggle could go on forever. They grind the PA into the dust, thus strengthening the radical axis.

Today it is clear that Israel's aggressive policy has hurt the status of the US in Iraq and Afghanistan. A change in Israeli policy has become a strategic American interest. However, Obama has avoided taking any practical step toward showing Israel that the rules have changed. There is a good chance that now, in the light of the flotilla attack, he will exploit Israel's new isolation to press Netanyahu into changing the composition of his government. Washington wants to see him at the head of a new coalition based on the Likud, Kadima and Labor.

Yet the hope that such a step will bear fruit, enabling meaningful negotiations, is based on wishful thinking. In the past 17 years Israel has known many governments—of Labor, Likud and also Kadima. All failed the reality test. All avoided confronting the settlers. All entered negotiations with the PA as a mere delaying tactic to soften criticism from the West.

WAC calls for broad-based international action that will force Israel to agree to the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, within the June 1967 borders. If the efforts of the current crisis focus on a compromise with Israel

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for investigating the flotilla attack, without bearing down on the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the region will continue to deteriorate. Israel's present dispute with Turkey, following the flotilla debacle, shows how slippery is the slope down which we slide.

The Middle East is divided today between fundamentalist regimes and dictatorial, pro-American regimes. Between these stones its peoples are ground. Utterly missing, in the public discourse, are the oppression and poverty from which the workers suffer—whether in Egypt, where they demonstrate for a raise in the minimum wage, holding loaves of bread aloft before the parliament of Hosni Mubarak; or in Iran, where they struggle against privatization and joblessness under Ahmadinejad. In Turkey also the workers have gone to the streets in recent months, against privatization and unemployment. The workers of the Middle East do not have a party to represent them. Their voice is not heard.

Israel too can hardly be said to seek the good of its citizens. It has no scruples about implementing a policy of privatization, cuts in social services and destruction of the social safety net, all for the benefit of a coterie of tycoons, the real string-pullers. In recent years the number of people who are both employed and poor has grown. Among households with one breadwinner, 36% were beneath the poverty line in 2008/9.

Jews and Arabs alike suffer here, as do people in the rest of the world, from a gloves-off capitalist regime, which discriminates against workers and tramples their rights. The occupation merely sharpens the suffering of both peoples. Solidarity between Jewish and Arab workers is the only way to overcome the cycle of bloodshed. The supreme interest of the workers on both sides of the conflict is to build a political and social alternative, egalitarian and humane, against a right-wing Zionist chauvinism and an Islamic fundamentalism that are leading both peoples into catastrophe.

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