



**The Meir Amit Intelligence and  
Terrorism Information Center**

September 16, 2010

**Viva Palestina, an organization headed by George Galloway, announced that a large, mostly overland aid convoy would leave London for the Gaza Strip via Europe on September 18. The convoy's spokesman is Zaher Birawi, a Hamas activist involved in intensive anti-Israel activity in Britain.**

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**Zaher Birawi, Hamas activist in Britain, spokesman for the Viva Palestina aid convoy about to leave for the Gaza Strip. Birawi was involved in organizing previous land and sea convoys, including the convoy which confronted the Egyptian security forces in January 2010. He was present at the ceremony when the Mavi Marmara set sail from Istanbul, where this picture was probably taken (Picture from Facebook).**

## Overview

1. **Viva Palestina**, an organization headed by former British MP George Galloway, announced that its aid convoy would leave London for the Gaza Strip on Saturday, September 18. It will pass through various European countries (including Turkey) where it will be joined by pro-Hamas/pro-Palestinian activists. It will then go to Syria and meet trucks from Jordan, leaving the Syrian port of Latakia and sailing to the port of El Arish. There the convoy will be enlarged by trucks from North African countries. From El Arish the convoy is expected to move toward the Gaza Strip and plans to enter through the Rafah crossing during the first half of October.

2. According to **Viva Palestina** publicity, we have found that the convoy is part of an extensive anti-Israel propaganda effort, one of a variety of similar projects of an international coalition working to isolate Israel and undermine its legitimacy. At this point it is unclear whether the organizers of the current convoy will in fact keep to the planned schedule or if and how they will overcome political obstacles, especially with Egypt. However, **Viva Palestina**, which collaborates closely with the Turkish Islamist organization IHH, has in the past proved its ability to organize and execute land and sea convoys to the Gaza Strip.

3. **Viva Palestina** has a record of violence and provocation, as evidenced by the behavior of its last convoy (December 2009-January 2010), which consisted of 500 activists from various countries. About half were Turkish, and prominent among them were operatives from IHH, headed by Bülent Yildirim. The convoy activists were involved in violent confrontations with the Egyptian security forces following Egypt's announcement that it would not allow a similar convoy into Egyptian territory, and that George Galloway had been declared persona non grata.<sup>1</sup>



Egyptian forces in El Arish confronting Viva Palestina's last convoy. The Egyptian authorities refused to allow some of the trucks through the Rafah crossing (ihh.org.tr, January 2010).

<sup>1</sup> For further information see the July 19, 2010 bulletin, [A comparison of the IHH violence directed against the IDF during the Mavi Marmara flotilla \(June 2010\) and the violence employed by the Lifeline 3 activists against the Egyptian security forces \(January 2010\)](#).

4. **The spokesman for the current Viva Palestina convoy is Zaher Khaled Hassan Birawi, a Hamas activist who was involved in organizing the previous land and sea convoys, and who entered the Gaza Strip with Galloway's last convoy. In our assessment, he serves as a kind of liaison person between George Galloway and Hamas. In his activities in sending convoys, and in Britain in general, Birawi collaborates with Muhammad Sawalha, another Hamas activist who found a safe haven in Britain.**

5. Like other activists who sought refuge in Britain,<sup>2</sup> **Birawi is careful not to identify himself publicly with Hamas or even with the Muslim Brotherhood in order to avoid entanglements with the British authorities and legal system. However, according to reliable information, while in Britain he serves as Hamas' Judea and Samaria representative in the movement's institutions and conferences which take place outside the Palestinian territories.**



**The ceremony before the launching of the Mavi Marmara in Istanbul. Participants wave IHH and Palestinian flags. Third from left in the front row is Birawi, and next of him (in the light gray suit) is Muhammad Sawalha.<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> For further information see the February 21, 2010 bulletin, [Britain as a Focus for Hamas' Political, Propaganda and Legal Activities in Europe](#)

<sup>3</sup> [http://hurryupharry.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/IHH\\_rally\\_Istanbul.jpg](http://hurryupharry.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/IHH_rally_Istanbul.jpg)

## Appendix I

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### Zaher Birawi and his activities in Britain

1. Zaher Khaled Hassan Birawi (aka Abu Khaled), 49, is a Hamas activist who was born in the village of Asira al-Shimaliyah, northwest of Nablus, and who today resides in Britain.
2. In 1988 he was questioned by the Israeli security forces on suspicion of participation in rioting in his village and of incitement to rioting. He denied the allegations.
3. In the early 1990s he went to Britain to study. There he became involved in Muslim activities, especially those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas' parent movement.
4. In 1996 he entered the Gaza Strip (for a short period of time) where he worked at the Islamic University in Gaza City, an academic institution controlled by Hamas.<sup>4</sup>
5. During his intensive ongoing activity in Britain, **he has been careful not to identify himself publicly with Hamas or even with the Muslim Brotherhood in order to avoid entanglements with the British authorities and legal system. However, according to reliable information, while in Britain he serves as Hamas' Judea and Samaria representative in the movement's institutions and conferences which take place outside the Palestinian territories.**
6. Zaher Birawi is intensively involved in the activity of organizations and institutions in Britain, some of them actually in existence and some, in our assessment, may be virtual. They include:
  - A. In the early 1990s Birawi began his career in Britain as spokesman for the **Grand Mosque in Leeds**.<sup>5</sup>
  - B. Between 2001 and 2003 he was chairman of the **Muslim Association of Britain (MAB)**, affiliated with the British branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Muhammad Sawalha, a Hamas activist who fled to Britain, was one of the Association's founder.
  - C. Until recently he was chairman of an organization called the **Palestinian Forum in Britain (PFB)**, and today he is responsible for its public relations.

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<sup>4</sup> For further information see the bulletin about the Islamic University in the Gaza Strip, dominated by Hamas, on the ITIC website in Hebrew.

<sup>5</sup> In 2005 the name of the Grand Mosque of Leeds was linked in the British media to terrorist operatives involved in the deadly terrorist attacks on the underground and a bus in London. ([http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/july-dec05/london\\_7-15.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/july-dec05/london_7-15.html), July 15, 2005; *The Independent*, August 13, 2005). On July 7, 2005, the Palestinian Forum in Britain issued a condemnation of the terrorist attacks.

D. He is a senior activist in the **British Muslim Initiative (BMI)**, affiliated with the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain, which is headed by **Muhammad Sawalha**.

E. He is on the board of trustees of an institution called **Education Aid for Palestine (EAP)**, some of whose activists are affiliated with Hamas. The EAP was established in 1993 by Issam Yussuf, one of the founders of the **British Interpal**, which is involved in transferring funds to Hamas "charitable societies." According to reports on the Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily website, the EAP belongs to the Union of Good, an umbrella organization which channels funds to Hamas.<sup>6</sup> The organization represents itself as providing aid for the Palestinians through education and training, but actually it is involved in anti-Israel activities (such as organizing demonstrations).

F. Birawi directs the programs and is the lead presenter **on Al-Hiwar TV, an Arabic-language television channel broadcasting from London and affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Hiwar TV engages in propaganda collaboration with Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV in the Gaza Strip.** For example, in March 2010 Birawi arranged an interview with Ismail Haniya, head of the de facto Hamas administration. In addition, in July 2010 it broadcast an Al-Aqsa TV program about the land and sea convoys.



The Al-Hiwar TV logo next to those of other media affiliated with Hamas or the Muslim Brotherhood, which broadcast Al-Aqsa TV-produced programs about the land and sea convoys to the Gaza Strip under the heading "A Story of Determination" (July 29, 2010).

7. Zaher Birawi is chairman of the board of directors of the **Palestinian Return Center (PRC)**, a London-based institution which conducts intensive anti-Israel activity representing Israel as exclusively responsible for the problem of the Palestinian refugees. **In our assessment, it is one of the central institutions in Britain through which Hamas operates. Several Hamas activists who found refuge in Britain serve in senior positions in the PRC.**

<sup>6</sup> globalmbreport.org.

8. The PRC lobbies the British Parliament, distributes propaganda and holds workshops and seminars whose objective is to increase awareness for the issue of the Palestinian refugees. **Its name was recently mentioned as collaborating with the American Free Palestine Movement to send 200 Palestinians to Israel by plane to demand to realize "the right of return."** The executive director for the PRC is **Arafat Madhi Shukri, who is also chairman of the European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza** (an umbrella organization preparing to send a large sea convoy to the Gaza Strip along with other organizations which are members of the anti-Israel coalition operating around the globe.<sup>7</sup>)

## **Birawi's involvement in the land and sea convoys to the Gaza Strip**

9. **In recent years Zaher Birawi has been intensively and continuously involved in sending convoys to the Gaza Strip** (the Lifeline convoys) **through Viva Palestina**. In our assessment, he may serve as a kind of liaison between the organization and Hamas. He participated in the convoy which confronted the Egyptian security forces in January 2010. Some of the members of the convoy did eventually enter the Gaza Strip and were received by senior Hamas figures. He was also involved in organizing the Mavi Marmara flotilla and participated in its launching from Istanbul on May 22. Today he is the spokesman for Viva Palestina's Lifeline 5 convoy, currently organizing and expected to set out from London.

Zaher Birawi



**The Lifeline 3 delegation received in the Gaza Strip. Front row, left to right: Second from left, Zaher Birawi, George Galloway, Ahmed Bakher (first deputy to the chairman of the Hamas faction in the Palestinian Legislative Council), Bülent Yildirim (Hurryupharry.org.)**

<sup>7</sup> For further information see the September 6, 2010 bulletin, "An anti-Israel coalition, some of whose members organized the Mavi Marmara flotilla, were encouraged by its results. It is currently promoting a new series of projects to embarrass and isolate Israel. They include an upgraded flotilla and a plane to the Gaza Strip" at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/pdf/ipc\\_e120.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ipc_e120.pdf).



Zaher Birawi

The Lifeline 3 delegation received in the Gaza Strip with Turkish and IHH flags in the background (IHH website, January 10, 2010).