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The Meir Amit Intelligence
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Center

Seniors in Interpal, a British fund that supports Hamas, play a major role in sending aid convoys to Gaza. South African organizations belonging to the Union of Good are also involved. It is our assessment that convoys portrayed as a humanitarian project are also a means of transferring money to Hamas.



Ismail Haniya, head of the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip, meets with activists of the Miles of Smiles 4 delegation, which entered the Gaza Strip on July 31, 2011 (Safa, August 1, 2011). We identified the two activists as Essam Yousef, vice-chairman of Interpal, referred to in Arab media as "general coordinator" of the convoy (left), and Ibrahim Hewitt, Interpal's chairman (right). Senior Interpal officials also met with Ismail Haniya when previous Miles of Smiles convoys entered the Gaza Strip.

Overview

1. Recently obtained information indicates that organizations and activists formerly involved in transferring funds to Hamas through aid foundations in Britain and elsewhere **now play key roles in sending humanitarian aid convoys to the Gaza Strip**. These organizations and activists operate, or operated, **as part of the Union of Good**—an umbrella network comprised of dozens of Islamic funds across the world that funnel money to Hamas institutions. The Union of Good was outlawed in Israel and the U.S.
2. Of particular note is **the involvement of senior officials in Interpal**, a British fund that transfers funds to Hamas and was outlawed in the U.S. and Israel, **in sending the so-called Miles of Smiles aid convoys to the Gaza Strip to support Hamas. The four Miles of Smiles convoys** sent over the past two years entered the Gaza Strip with no particular problems. Their arrival was coordinated with the Egyptian administration. A fifth convoy is scheduled to reach Gaza in late August, with two more scheduled to arrive by November. In addition, organizations and activists from South Africa belonging to the **Union of Good** (the Al-Aqsa Foundation and the MJC) are also involved in sending aid convoys to the Gaza Strip. These **South African aid convoys** are now crossing Africa, including Sudan, on their way to the Gaza Strip, and will likely arrive in late August. A senior Al-Aqsa Foundation activist also took part in **the British Miles of Smiles 3 convoy** (June 2011).
3. The Miles of Smiles convoys and the South African convoys are portrayed as providers of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. However, when considering the past involvement of Interpal and Union of Good foundations in transferring funds to Hamas, **it is our assessment that, in addition to humanitarian aid, these convoys may also be providing financial assistance to Hamas**. Although we have no firm, recent information to that effect, we do know of a case where in 2009 Interpal activists joined the Viva Palestina convoy headed by George Galloway, **who was photographed giving a stack of banknotes to the national economy minister of the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip** (a year later Galloway said that he had transferred £1.4 million to Ismail Haniya, see photographs below).
4. In addition to providing assistance to the de facto Hamas administration, activists belonging to Interpal and other anti-Israeli organizations hold **publicized meetings with Ismail Haniya**, head of the de facto Hamas administration, and **with other Hamas activists**. The meetings are held once the aid convoys enter the Gaza Strip, aiming to **support the political and propaganda efforts exerted by Hamas** and its institutions in the Gaza Strip **to obtain legitimacy in Western countries** and thus whitewash its terrorist image. It is also likely, in our assessment, that, in their meetings with anti-Israeli British

activists visiting the Gaza Strip, senior Hamas officials **encourage various aspects of the anti-Israeli delegitimization campaign** (flotillas, convoys, prosecution of Israeli figures, boycotts of Israel through the BDS, propaganda activities, etc.), **whose major hub in Europe is the UK.**

Senior Interpal officials' involvement in Miles of Smiles convoys

5. In the past two years (starting August 2009) **four aid convoys named "Miles of Smiles"** have been sent to the Gaza Strip. The most recent, Miles of Smiles 4, **entered the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing on July 31, 2011. Its arrival was coordinated with the Egyptian authorities.** The convoy consisted of 35 activists and carried humanitarian and medical aid. Welcome ceremonies for the convoy were held in the Gaza Strip, and its members held official meetings with the de facto Hamas administration (the convoy activists met with Ismail Haniya, head of the de facto Hamas administration; Ahmed Bahr, deputy chairman of the Legislative Council; and Islamic delegates of the Legislative Council). The convoy activists also took part in "popular" activities (such as a soccer game). The convoy left the Gaza Strip on August 3 and **the activists returned to Britain** (Safa, August 3).

6. **Dr. Essam Yousef, the highest-ranking member of Interpal** (even though his title is "vice-chairman"), **was mentioned on the Arab media as the general coordinator** (*al-munasiq al-'aam*) **of both the recent convoy¹ and of Miles of Smiles 2.²** He also took part in the first and third Miles of Smiles convoys.³ Another participant, at least in Miles of Smiles 3 (June 2011) and Miles of Smiles 4 (July 31, 2011), was **Interpal's chairman, Ibrahim Hewitt.** Both activists took part in meetings with Ismail Haniya, head of the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip.⁴ In addition to senior Interpal activists, **the convoys also included other anti-Israeli activists involved in the campaign to delegitimize Israel in Britain.**

7. In his statements in the Gaza Strip, Dr. Issam Yousef, the "general coordinator" of Miles of Smiles 4, emphasized the importance of "international solidarity" with the Gaza Strip, and

¹ <http://www.ikhwanonline.com>, June 18, 2011.

² <http://www.eetelaf.org>, August 10, 2010.

³ <http://www.eetelaf.org>, August 10, 2010; <http://ncst.edu.ps>, August 23, 2009.

⁴ Safa, August 1, 2011; hurrypharry.org, June 22, 2011.

called for action to lift the “siege” imposed on Gaza. He said that **the convoys to the Gaza Strip will continue, and that another convoy will arrive at the end of the Ramadan** (late August). Yousef also added that yet another convoy will arrive “between the two holidays” (i.e., in September or October), to be followed by a convoy on Sacrifice Feast (which starts in early November) (Palestine-info, August 1). **Ali al-Nazli**, spokesman for the Hamas-run Popular Committee Against the Siege (PCAS), also said that **the Miles of Smiles convoy will arrive in the Gaza Strip at the end of the Ramadan (late August)**.

Portrait of the Interpal fund

8. **Interpal is a British aid fund which plays a major role in transferring money to the Hamas civilian infrastructure in the PA-administered territories.**⁵ It was **outlawed by Israel in 1997 and declared a terrorist organization in 1998**. In the United States it was included in Executive Order 13224, which froze the assets of five charitable societies that sponsored Hamas and six senior Hamas officials (August 2003).⁶ The Union of Good, the umbrella organization under which Interpal operated, was designated as a terrorist entity by the United States in November 2008 for channeling funds to Hamas.

9. **In recent years Interpal has scaled back its activity in the PA-administered territories**, a move linked to an investigation conducted against the fund by Britain’s Charity Commission. The investigation was prompted in part by a BBC Panorama report titled **“Faith, Hate and Charity”** (aired in July 2006), which exposed Interpal **as a political instrument that assists Hamas’ civilian infrastructure**. The program showed that Interpal funds were transferred to Hamas-managed “charitable societies” in the PA-administered territories. The “charitable societies” supported by Interpal were involved in inculcating Hamas’ radical Islamic ideology in the younger generation of Palestinians and nurturing the ethos of jihad and the cult of martyrdom, for which purpose they fostered an education system affiliated with Hamas. The program featured footage showing anti-Israel incitement and encouragement of terrorism at activities conducted by the charitable societies.

⁵ See our December 2004 Information Bulletin: [“Interpal is the most important Palestinian fund operating in Britain. During the last decade \(and beforehand under a different name\) Interpal helped transfer large sums of money collected in Britain and elsewhere to charitable societies and committees operating in the Palestinian Authority \(PA\) – administered territories. However, most, if not all, of those charitable societies and committees are actually Hamas-operated and therefore contribute significantly to maintaining the large-scale, local Hamas civilian \(and terrorist-operational\) infrastructure \(da’wah\). Consequently, Interpal was outlawed by Israel in 1997 and declared a terrorist organization in 1998. Furthermore, in the United States it was designated by Executive Order 13224 \(August 2003\) as an entity that “commits, or threatens to commit or supports terrorism.”](#)

⁶ treasury.gov, August 22, 2003.

10. **As the investigation came to a close, Interpal was ordered by the Charity Commission to fully dissociate itself from the Union of Good.** Essam Yousef, **Interpal's dominant figure**, publicly announced that in March 2009 he severed all his ties with the Union of Good (Insanonline.net/news, May 31, 2009). However, according to our assessment, it is doubtful whether this actually took place.⁷

11. In recent years **Interpal is facing yet another difficulty** as a result of the strenuous efforts made by the Salam Fayyad government against Hamas' "charitable societies" in Judea and Samaria. Salam Fayyad's government replaced the board members of the Hamas' charitable societies, causing a considerable drop in fund transfers to new societies affiliated with Fatah and the PA. **It is possible, in our assessment, that these difficulties prompted Interpal to shift the focus of its aid efforts to Hamas in the Gaza Strip and avail itself of the assistance of humanitarian aid convoys sent to the Gaza Strip, such as Miles of Smiles.**

12. With that in mind, it should be considered that the Miles of Smiles convoys and other convoys departing from Britain to the Gaza Strip (such as those organized by Viva Palestina) are exploited by Interpal also **to send financial assistance to Hamas in the guise of delivering humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip** (even though we have no firm information to that effect). Also to be mentioned is the **political and propaganda assistance Interpal and other activists from Western countries extend to Hamas** simply by holding frequent (and publicized) meetings with senior Hamas officials in the Gaza Strip. They do so with the aim of presenting Hamas to British and Western public opinion as a legitimate organization that represents the Palestinians, and eroding its image as a terrorist organization.

Profiles of senior Interpal activists taking part in the aid convoys sent to the Gaza Strip

13. In the past two years senior Interpal activists **participating in anti-Israeli activity in Britain** have been part of the British-based project of aid convoys for the Gaza Strip. **Such high-ranking Interpal activists as Essam Yousef and Ibrahim Hewitt have played an active role in organizing the Miles of Smiles convoys and leading them to the Gaza Strip.** Other Interpal activists accompanied British convoys heading to the Gaza Strip

⁷ We have no proof to indicate that the relations have been severed—quite on the contrary. Al-Quds al-Arabi, a newspaper published in London, mentioned Essam Yousef as the person in charge of the Union of Good in Europe (alquds.co.uk, May 17, 2011).

and met with senior Hamas officials on behalf of former anti-Israeli MP George Galloway, the leader of Viva Palestina.

14. **Dr. Essam Salah Mustafa Yousef (Abu Yousef)** is Interpal's dominant figure, a key personality in the Hamas-supporting financial system in the Western world, and the co-founder and former executive director of the Union of Good (an umbrella organization consisting of dozens of Islamic foundations worldwide which channel funds to Hamas institutions). In his capacity as the convoys' "general coordinator", **he accompanied and headed Miles of Smiles convoys sent to the Gaza Strip over the past two years.**



Essam Yousef was mentioned in an article published on the Union of Good website on August 10, 2010. The article dealt with the Miles of Smiles 2, and Yousef was said to be the "convoy's general coordinator".

15. **Ibrahim Brian Hewitt**, a British citizen who converted to Islam, is the chairman of Interpal and is involved in the activity of Islamic organizations in Britain. He took part in the aid convoys sent to the Gaza Strip and met with Ismail Haniya. He is also **the senior editor of the Middle East Monitor (MEMO)**, an institute hostile to Israel established in mid-2009. It refers to itself as an independent institution for media research on Middle Eastern affairs; however, judging by the views the institute advocates, it appears that MEMO is affiliated with radical Islam. The director of MEMO is **Dr. Daud Abdullah**, a senior figure in the London-based **Palestinian Return Center (PRC)**, an anti-Israeli propaganda center affiliated with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, some of whose leaders are Hamas activists who were granted asylum in Britain.⁸

⁸ See: ["The Palestinian Return Centre: London-based center for anti-Israeli propaganda, affiliated with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, outlawed in Israel. It promotes the demand of the Palestinian refugees to return as a way of destroying Israel. Senior PRC figures send flotillas and convoys to the Gaza Strip and transfer funds to Hamas"](#) (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, March 30, 2011).

Ismail Haniya's meetings with Interpal seniors, as well as with other anti-Israeli activists from Britain and an anti-Israeli activist from South Africa



Ismail Haniya and Essam Yousef meet following the arrival of Miles of Smiles 3 convoy in the Gaza Strip (hurrypharry.org, June 22, 2011)



Pro-Hamas activists meet with Ismail Haniya (hurrypharry.org, June 22, 2011). To the right of Ismail Haniya are (left to right): Sheikh Ebrahim Gabriels (Jibril), a South African activist who heads a local organization belonging to the Union of Good; Ismail Patel (in a black skullcap), an anti-Israeli activist from Britain who is the head of Friends of Al-Aqsa; Mohamed Ali Harrath (with a black beard), an Islamic activist and CEO of the British Islam Channel; Ibrahim Hewitt (in a white skullcap), the chairman of Interpal¹ (right).



Essam Yousef (left) and other activists from Britain meet with Ismail Haniya as the Miles of Smiles 3 convoy visits the Gaza Strip (falesteen.ps). The person shaking Ismail Haniya's hand is probably Mohamed Ali Harrath, the CEO of an Islamist English-language channel (Islam Channel) and activist of the Al-Nahda Islamic movement in Tunisia. To Haniya's right is Carl Arrindell, one of the directors of Islam Channel and, at least formerly, an Interpal activist.

Visits to the Gaza Strip held by Interpal activists as part of the Viva Palestina aid convoy

16. **Sheikh Majdi Akeel** is a Palestinian Hamas activist originally from Gaza who was granted asylum in London. He is a member of the PRC board and **an activist of Interpal, which he represents in Manchester**. On March 13, 2010, he took part in an Interpal conference in Manchester to raise funds for the convoys sent to the Gaza Strip.

17. A year prior to that, in the beginning of March 2009, **Sheikh Majdi Akeel visited the Gaza Strip with a Viva Palestina convoy**, a project headed by former anti-Israeli British MP George Galloway. **He was joined by several Interpal representatives** who came to the Gaza Strip to examine the progress of the foundation's projects.⁹



Viva Palestina leader George Galloway gives a stack of money bills to Ziyad al-Zaza, the minister of national economy of the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip, during his visit there (Reuters, Muhammad Salem, March 9, 2009). On April 13, 2010, Galloway held a conference at the city hall of Kensington, London, where he reported that he had given £1.4 million to Ismail Haniya, "the elected prime minister of Palestine" (youtube.com, aljazeera.net).

Participation of South African organizations and activists belonging to the Union of Good in aid convoys for the Gaza Strip

18. **Pro-Hamas organizations in South Africa belonging to the Union of Good are also involved in sending aid convoys to the Gaza Strip.** On July 29, a convoy called Africa Aid 1, with nine vehicles and about one hundred volunteers, headed out from Cape Town. The convoy is expected to cross South Africa and, once in Tanzania, fly to Egypt. It will likely arrive in the Gaza Strip by late August. Prior to that, it may join another South African convoy that left Durban on July 14 and **passed through Sudan** (it is our assessment that in Sudan, there may be a potential of contact between South African activists and members of Hamas).

19. The aid convoy that headed out from Cape Town was organized by two Muslim organizations operating in South Africa: **Al-Quds Foundation**, the South African branch of the Al-Quds international institution; and an organization known as the **Muslim Judicial Council (MJC)**, which belongs to the Union of Good. MJC is one of the oldest Muslim organizations in South Africa. Established in Cape Town in 1945, it is headed by **Maulana Ihsaan Hendricks** (also the director of Al-Quds Foundation). His predecessor was **Sheikh**

⁹ Insanonline.net.

Ebrahim Gabriels, formerly a board member of the Union of Good. Gabriels is currently the head of UUCSA, an umbrella organization of all Muslim organizations in South Africa, **and the director of Al-Aqsa Foundation.**

20. **Al-Aqsa Foundation**, headed by Sheikh Ebrahim Gabriels (Arabic: Ibrahim Jibril), **is the South African branch of the international Al-Aqsa Foundation**, established in 1992. In 2003, the international Al-Aqsa Foundation, including its South African branch, **was outlawed in the United States for supporting terrorism.**¹⁰ The South African branch of the foundation was one of the 36 global funds and foundations declared as illegal associations in Israel by an order of Israel's defense minister Ehud Barak in early July 2008.¹¹ Al-Aqsa Foundation branches in such countries as Holland and Belgium were outlawed in Israel and the United States. The Holland branch of the Al-Aqsa Foundation is on the EU list of terrorist organizations.



The logo of Al-Aqsa Foundation, the South African branch of the global Al-Aqsa Foundation (the organization's website, August 7, 2011)

21. **Sheikh Ebrahim Gabriels** (Ibrahim Jibril), the head of Al-Aqsa Foundation, **entered the Gaza Strip with the Miles of Smiles 3 convoy** on June 19, 2011. After the convoy entered the Gaza Strip, Ebrahim Gabriels gave a speech at the Rafah crossing.¹² The event was also attended by **two senior Interpal activists** who arrived with the convoy, Ibrahim Hewitt and Essam Yousef.

¹⁰ U.S. Treasury Department website, May 29, 2003.

¹¹ See our July 8, 2008 Information Bulletin: ["The war on financing terrorism: Defense Minister Ehud Barak signed an order outlawing 36 global "Union of Good" Islamic funds which raise money for Hamas institutions in the Palestinian Authority-administered territories. The money supports Hamas in building a political alternative to the PA and maintain a terrorism-supporting system"](#).

¹² www.vocfm.co.za (Islamic website based in Cape Town), June 21, 2011.



Sheikh Ebrahim Gabriels gives a speech at the Rafah crossing following the arrival of the Miles of Smiles 3 convoy

22. During the stay of Miles of Smiles 3 activists in the Gaza Strip, a **joint Interpal and Miles of Smiles delegation visited the Islamic University of Gaza, an academic institution controlled by Hamas**. Members of the delegation included Interpal chairman Ibrahim Hewitt, vice-chairman Essam Yousef, and **Ibrahim Jibril** (i.e., Gabriels), the head of the South African **Al-Aqsa Foundation** branch.¹³ The joint delegation met with senior staff members of the Islamic University and gave several scholarships to its students. Interpal vice-chairman **Essam Yousef** said that he was proud of the Islamic University of Gaza since the day of its establishment. Ibrahim Hewitt and Ibrahim Jibril also had praise for the university.¹⁴



The delegation leaders meet with senior staff members of the Islamic University of Gaza (Islamic University of Gaza website). From right to left, we identified: Khaled al-Hindi, a senior Islamic University official; Interpal chairman Ibrahim Hewitt (wearing a white skullcap); Ebrahim Gabriels, head of the South African Al-Aqsa Foundation; Dr. Rifat Rustum, a senior Islamic University official. Dr. Essam Yousef can be seen in the background.

¹³ Islamic University of Gaza website, June 28, 2011.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Profile of the Islamic University of Gaza

23. The Islamic University of Gaza, which was visited by the joint Interpal and Miles of Smiles 3 delegation, **is a reputable Islamic academic institution controlled by Hamas**. Since its establishment, it has been **a Hamas political, social, cultural, and military stronghold**. It was founded in 1978 by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder and former leader of Hamas. Since Hamas seized power in June 2006, the university has improved its status and considerably increased the extent of its academic activity.

24. **Politically**, the university is a haven for the growth and development of Hamas leaders (including senior Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operatives), many of whom had their start there (including Ismail Haniya). **In the military aspect**, the university is used by the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades to carry out a wide variety of activities; prior to Operation Cast Lead its laboratories were exploited to develop and manufacture weapons. **As far as the battle for hearts and minds is concerned**, the university is a center for intensive brainwashing and indoctrinating students with the radical Islamic ideology of the Hamas movement, particularly hostility towards Israel and following the path of jihad.

25. During Operation Cast Lead (December 28, 2008) the Israeli Air Force attacked Hamas' weapons research and development center, located in the laboratory wing of the university. The attack was exploited by Hamas for a propaganda campaign to paint the Israeli attack as an aggression against an "innocent" academic institution (which was also reflected in the Goldstone Report). Following the Israeli operation, Hamas allocated \$25 million towards rebuilding the university and helping its students.

26. **The university is a favorite choice for donations from various organizations in Arab countries and the Western world, including foundations belonging to the Union of Good**. Organizations in Britain have been involved in providing assistance to the university, and British academic institutions where pro-Hamas activity takes place have established academic relations with it. For instance, higher education institutions in Britain have twinned with the Islamic University. Such institutions include the London School of Economics (LSE) and the students' union of Queen Mary College of the University of London.¹⁵

¹⁵ See our April 28, 2010 Information Bulletin (Hebrew): "[The Islamic University in the Gaza Strip: a Hamas-controlled higher education institution supported by foreign parties, including Western countries](#)".