



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(May 23 – 29, 2018)

Overview

► **In the Gaza Strip there is escalation, the first of its kind since Operation Protective Edge (2014).** It began two months ago with the "return marches" orchestrated by Hamas. The "return marches" include mass riots near the border fence, attempts of massive numbers of people to penetrate into Israeli territory and a deliberate increase in the level of violence and terrorism, including shooting attacks, IEDs placed along the border fence, penetration of terrorist squads into Israel, the flying of incendiary kites and drones carrying explosives.

► **On the morning of May 29, 2018, a new stage began** (alongside the existing pattern of attacks), when **at least 27 mortar shells were fired at a number of targets in the western Negev. It was the most massive mortar attack since Operation Protective Edge**, and the first since the beginning of the "return marches." Most of the shells were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. The attack was carried out when children were being driven to school. One shell fell next to a kindergarten.

► The mortar shells were fired by the **Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)** in retaliation for the killing of three of its military operatives during an IDF attack on one of the organization's observation posts (May 27, 2018). **In response to the mortar fire Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked more than 30 terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip** (IDF spokesperson, May 29, 2018). At around noon on May 29, while the IDF attacked inside the Gaza Strip, **barrages of rockets and mortar shells were fired at communities in the western Negev. Note: The terrorists' shooting and IDF attacks continued throughout the day and night of May 29.** This document is updated to noon, May 29, 2018.

► **In the meantime, propaganda-related activities organized by Hamas in the battle for hearts and minds continue.** This coming Friday, June 1, 2018, another "return march" is supposed to be held, with the slogan "From Gaza to Haifa, one blood and a common fate." In addition, on May 19, 2018, a boat set sail from the Gaza Strip ("the freedom ship"), apparently en route to Cyprus, and was halted by the IDF. On June 2, 2018, a Miles of Smiles

convoy is expected to enter the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing. It will bring humanitarian aid and its activists are Hamas supporters from various countries.

Mortar shells fired at communities in the western Negev

► **On May 29, 2018, beginning at 07:00, three barrages of at least 27 mortar shells were fired at a number of the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip.** Most of them were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system (IDF spokesperson, May 29, 2018). **The mortars were fired as children were being driven to school.** One of the shells fell **next to a kindergarten** in one of the communities in the western Negev. There were no children present at the time. **It was the most massive mortar attack since Operation Protective Edge (2014).** At the same time **light arms were fired at an IDF force** near the border fence. One soldier was injured by shrapnel, and structures were damaged. The previous evening sirens were sounded in the communities near the Gaza Strip because of **machine gun fire from the Gaza Strip.**

► In response to the mortar fire **Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked Hamas and PIJ targets in the southern and central Gaza Strip.** The IDF spokesperson reported that **more than 30 targets were hit.** According to Palestinian reports, among the targets were a post of Hamas' naval force near the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip and another post in Khan Yunis. A post belonging to the PIJ's military wing in Deir al-Balah was also hit (Shehab, May 29, 2018).

► Another mortar barrage was fired in the afternoon while the IDF was attacking in the Gaza Strip. The mortars targeted the communities near the Gaza Strip, Sderot and Ashqelon. Residents reported that the Iron Dome intercepted a number of mortar shells. **Note:** The shooting continued throughout the day and night of May 29, 2018.



Right: The remains of a mortar shell fired from the Gaza Strip (Shehab Facebook page, May 29, 2018). Left: The yard of a kindergarten in one of the communities in the western Negev after the mortar shell hit

(Twitter account of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing, May 29, 2018)

► **PIJ spokesman Da'ud Shehab** said the mortar fire was a "blessed response" from the "resistance." He added that the blood of the Palestinian people was not cheap and that Israel could not do whatever it liked (Facebook page of Da'ud Shehab, May 29, 2018). **Hamas said in a statement** that the "resistance's" activity was within the boundaries of its "natural right" to defend the Palestinian people and respond to "the crimes of killing committed by Israel."

Judea and Samaria

IDF soldier killed during detentions near Ramallah

► Before dawn on May 24, 2018, an IDF force from an elite unit arrived in the al-Am'ari refugee camp near Ramallah to detain terrorist operatives involved in recent shooting attacks. During the detentions a number of Palestinians rioted and threw various objects at the soldiers. One of them threw a slab of marble from the third floor of a building, landing on the head of one of the soldiers. **He was mortally injured and died two days later** (IDF spokesperson, May 24 and 26, 2018).

► **Husam Badran, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said in response to the killing of the soldier that it proved the spirit of "resistance" exists throughout the West Bank, despite [Israel's] "security oppression." He called on all the young people in Judea and Samaria to always keep struggling against IDF forces (Hamas website, May 27, 2018).

► As part of the efforts to locate the Palestinians involved in throwing the marble slab, on the morning of May 28, 2018, IDF forces encircled a building in the al-Am'ari refugee camp. A riot broke out between Palestinians and the IDF forces. Thirteen Palestinians were injured and several were detained. The Palestinian who threw the marble slab has not yet been detained (Ynet, May 28, 2018).

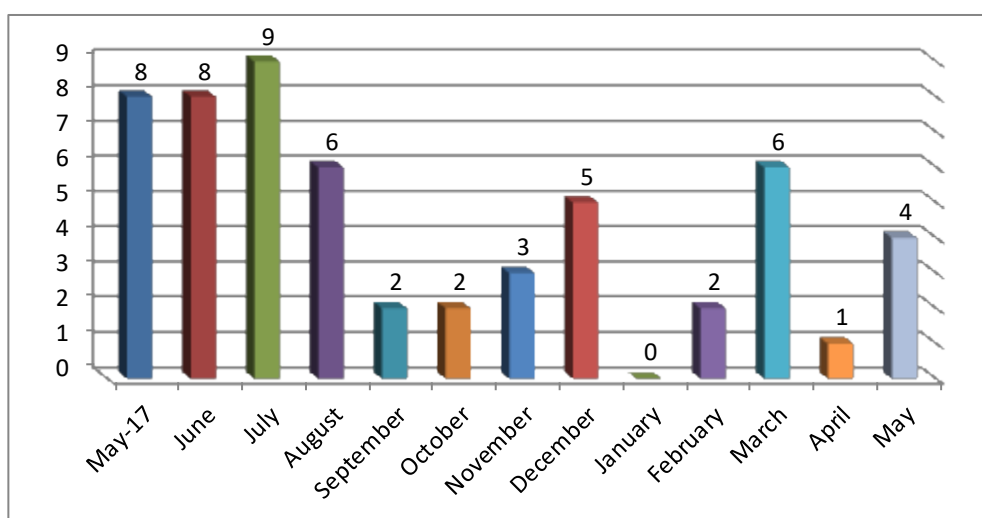
► Other prominent events in Judea and Samaria were the following:

- ◆ The night of **May 27, 2018** – An IED exploded near an IDF post at **the entrance to Nablus** (IDF spokesperson, May 28, 2018).

- ◆ **May 27, 2018** – During the evening, IDF forces near **the Beit Einoun Junction (northeast of Hebron)** halted a suspicious vehicle. The driver was found to be in possession of Molotov cocktails. He was detained after he confessed he was planning to carry out an attack (IDF spokesperson, May 27, 2018).

- ◆ **May 27, 2018** – A woman dressed in black walked along the railroad tracks near Beit Hanina (east Jerusalem) **in the direction of Pisgat Ze'ev**. Policemen were suspicious and called to her to stop. When she did not obey, they fired their weapons into the air, and when she still did not stop they fired at her legs. Nothing suspicious was found in her possession and she was taken for medical treatment (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, May 27, 2018).
- ◆ **May 25, 2018** – During the second Friday prayers of the Muslim religious month of Ramadan, a number of Palestinians on **the Temple Mount** waved Hamas flags. The Israel Police Force detained six Palestinians (Facebook page of Red Alert, May 27, 2018).

Significant terrorist attacks during the past year ¹



Israel's South

Events of Friday, May 25, 2018

► **About 5,000 Palestinians participated in the demonstrations along the Gaza Strip border in five main locations.** It was the smallest number of demonstrators since the "return marches" began on March 30, 2018. The Palestinians burned tires and threw stones. The rioters attempted to sabotage the security fence and harm IDF soldiers by throwing pipe bombs. An attempt was also made to penetrate into Israeli territory, and incendiary

¹ A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, a vehicular attack, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

kites were flown to set fire to fields.² IDF forces used riot control measures and fired shots in accordance with IDF orders for opening fire (IDF spokesperson, May 26, 2018).



The Friday events in the eastern Gaza Strip (Palinfo Twitter account, May 26, 2018).



**Palestinian boys sabotage the border security fence in the region of Khirbat Ikhza'a east of Khan Yunis (Palinfo Twitter account, May 26, 2018).
Hamis customarily sends its young men to sabotage the fence.³**



Children participate in the riots in Khirbat Ikhza'a east of Khan Yunis (Facebook page of journalist Maryam Abu Daqa, May 26, 2018).

²In response to the burning of thousands of acres of agricultural fields in the western Negev, the Israeli farmers near the border announced they would lodge a legal suit in the International Criminal Court in the The Hague against Hamas and its leaders Isma'il Haniyeh and Yahya al-Sinwar (Ynet, May 27, 2018).

³For further information, see the May 27, 2018, bulletin, "Hamas sends boys to their deaths in the 'great return march:' the case of Saadi Abu Salah, 16, who died in an attempt to cut through the security fence on May 14, 2018."

Terrorist attacks carried out under cover of and after the demonstrations

► Under cover of and after the demonstrations there were **a number of attempts to cross the security fence into Israeli territory:**

- ◆ **May 28, 2018 – Three Palestinians** were identified trying to cross the security fence in the northern Gaza Strip. An IDF force detained two of them; the third escaped. During the chase after the Palestinian shots were fired at the soldiers. **The two detainees were found to be in possession of knives, wire cutters, and accelerants.** No casualties were reported. In response IDF tanks shot at a nearby observation post. According to Palestinian reports, "resistance" observation posts and a post of the restraint force north of Beit Hanoun were attacked (Twitter account of Hamas' military wing, May 28, 2018). A spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip reported that one person had been killed and another wounded (May 28, 2018). Hamas' military wing said the fatality was **one of its operatives, Muhammad Masoud Ahmed al-Radhi'**, 31, from Beit Lahia (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website, date, 2018).



**Muhammad al-Radhi', an operative in Hamas' military wing
(Twitter account of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, May 28, 2018)**

- ◆ **May 28, 2018** – An incendiary kite was flown to the community of Nahal Oz (one of hundreds of such kites that have been flown). It caused a large fire.



Right: A Gazan flies an incendiary kite towards Nahal Oz. Left: The fire caused by the kite (Palinfo Twitter account, May 29, 2018).



A fire in a wheat field caused by an incendiary kite flown from the Gaza Strip (Palinfo Twitter account, May 28, 2018).

- ◆ **May 26, 2018 – An IED was placed near the security fence in the southern Gaza Strip.** It was hidden under a wire cutter and neutralized by an IDF force. No casualties were reported. In response, on May 27, 2018, IDF tanks shot a number of shells at an observation post in the southern Gaza Strip in the area where the IED had been found (IDF spokesperson, May 27, 2018).
- ◆ According to Palestinian sources, **a PIJ observation point southeast of Khan Yunis was attacked** (Twitter account of Shabakat Quds, May 27, 2018). **The PIJ's military wing announced the death of three of its operatives.** Senior figures in the organization promised to retaliate for their deaths. The PIJ's military wing announced it would not leave their deaths without a response and had the capability to "change the equation" (website of the Jerusalem Battalions, May 27, 2018).



The PIJ observation post attacked by the IDF (Shehab Facebook page, May 27, 2018).



The three PIJ operatives who were killed (left to right): Abd al-Halim al-Naqa, Hussein Samir al-Amour and Nassim Marwan al-Amour (website of the Jerusalem Battalions, May 27, 2018).

◆ **May 24, 2018** – Four Palestinians entered Israeli territory for a very short period of time and **set fire to an unmanned IDF post with a Molotov cocktail**. They left a tent behind inscribed "the return march returns to the lands of Palestine" (IDF spokesperson, May 26, 2018). IDF forces shot at them but they fled to the Gaza Strip. In response, on the night of May 26, 2018, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a number of Hamas targets in the southern Gaza Strip.

Casualties

► A spokesman for the Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip announced that in the events of May 25, 2018, 109 Palestinians were wounded, among them seven children and four women (Facebook page of the spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip and Ma'an, May 25, 2018). It was also reported that five Palestinians wounded on previous Fridays had died, **bringing to 117 the total number of Palestinians killed in the "return marches" since March 30, 2018.**

► Medical sources reported that four of the wounded had been **taken out of the Gaza Strip for treatment in Egypt** (al-Masry al-Youm, May 24, 2018). About 30 of the wounded were taken to **Jordan** for medical treatment (al-Quds, May 23, 2018). **The prime minister of**

Morocco told Isma'il Haniyeh that in response to his request, the King of Morocco had decided to send a field hospital to the Gaza Strip to treat Palestinians wounded in the "return marches" (Hamas website, May 28, 2018).

Statements from senior terrorist figures

► **Senior Hamas and PIJ figures participated in the Friday demonstrations and also delivered speeches.** Among them were **Isma'il Haniyeh**, head of Hamas' political bureau, **Yahya al-Sinwar**, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip, **Fathi Hamad**, a member of Hamas' political bureau, **Musheir al-Masri**, spokesman for the Hamas faction in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) in the Gaza Strip, and senior PIJ figure **Khaled al-Batsh**.



Yahya al-Sinwar (right) and Ahmed Bahar (left) visit the "return camp" east of Rafah (Facebook page of the PLC in the Gaza Strip, date, 2018).



Isma'il Haniyeh arrives for a visit at the "return camp" in eastern Gaza City (Facebook page of "Palestine Live" and the Palinfo Twitter account, May 25, 2018).

► According to **Fathi Hamad, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, the Palestinian people continue to gather for "return marches" near the border "in a number of locations that increases from one Friday to the next" (al-Aqsa, May 25, 2018). **Senior PIJ figure Khaled al-Batsh**, in a meeting with Gazan youth in a "return march" camp east of Gaza City, praised the "tire-burning unit," the "tear-gas neutralizing unit," the "[incendiary] kite unit,"

the "stone-throwing unit," the Palestinian women, the groups that sabotage the security fence, and all those who work for the sake of the [so-called] "right of return." He had special praise for the inventiveness of those who cut through the fence. He claimed the "return march" had not ended, but was only the beginning of a new era, in which the communities near the Gaza Strip would continue to witness the retreat and flight of their [Israeli] residents, and watch masses of Palestinians clash with Israelis (al-Aqsa, May 23, 2018).

Attempts to calm the situation

- ▶ Given the reports about the possibility of an arrangement between Hamas and Israel, **Khalil al-Haya, a member of Hamas' political bureau, said Hamas was prepared to examine any suggestion that would lead to the lifting of the siege on the Gaza Strip.** He confirmed that overtures had been made behind closed doors, but said Hamas had still not received a fixed suggestion. Khalil al-Haya denied that as part of an arrangement, a deal for [Israeli] prisoners and MIAs had been mentioned (alresala.net, May 25, 2018).
- ▶ On May 23, 2018, a Russian delegation arrived in the Gaza Strip, for the first time since the beginning of 2018. Its objective is to meet with representatives of Hamas and other organizations to calm the situation in the Gaza Strip (alresala.net, May 24, 2018).

Possible future events

- ▶ The so-called "supreme authority" of the "return marches" announced that **this coming Friday, June 1, 2018, the demonstrations would have the slogan "From Gaza to Haifa, one blood and a joint fate"** (Sawa, May 25, 2018).

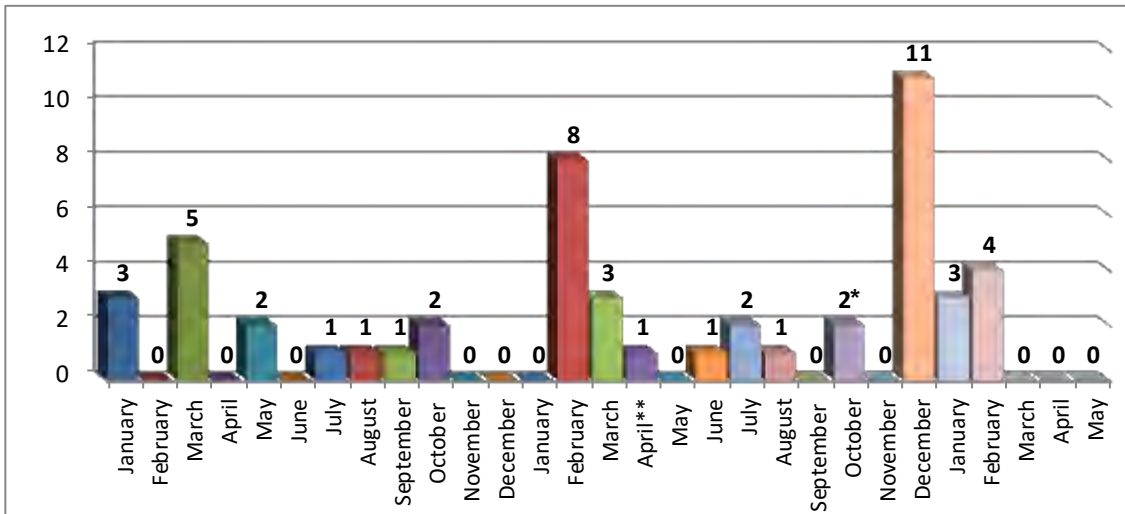


A post announcing the slogan and the activities planned for June 1, 2018, with pictures from a demonstration held in Haifa supporting the Gaza Strip and accompanied by the hashtag "#rage_with_gaza" (Facebook page of the "the great return march," May 26, 2018).

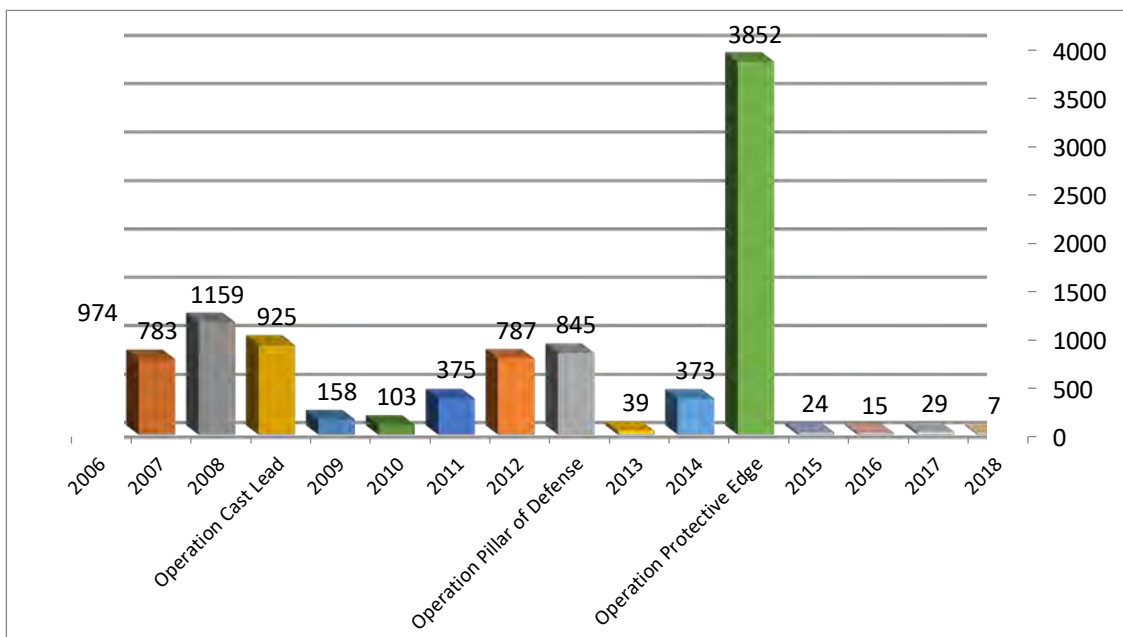
Rocket fire⁴

► This past week no rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory. **A barrage of at least 27 mortar shells was fired at the communities near the Gaza Strip on the morning of May 29, 2018.** One person was wounded by shrapnel. Another barrage, that included rockets and mortar shells, was fired around noon and continued.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Hits in Israel since January 2016



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits

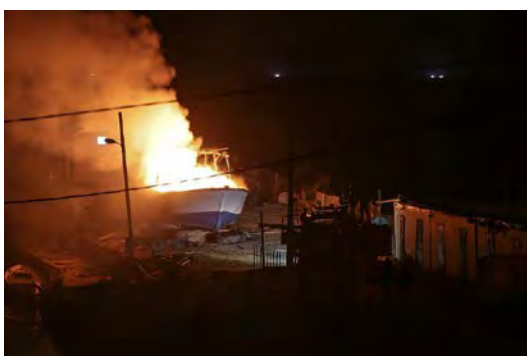


⁴The statistics do not include rockets that fell inside the Gaza Strip or mortar shell fire targeting Israeli territory.

IDF post burned and Israel's response

► **Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a Hamas underground terrorist infrastructure in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip.** In addition, two terrorist targets of Hamas' naval force in the Gaza port were attacked (IDF spokesperson, May 23, 2018). That was done in response to the burning of an IDF post in Israeli territory on May 22, 2018 by Palestinians who crossed the border fence, and in response to attempts to fly drones and kites into Israeli territory for terrorist purposes and to burn crops on the night of May 22, 2018.

► According to sources in the Gaza Strip, two boats of [Hamas'] naval force anchored in the fishing port west of Gaza City were attacked (Twitter account of Freedom Flotilla, May 24, 2018).



**The two boats attacked in the fishing port west of Gaza City
(Twitter account of Freedom Flotilla, May 24, 2018).**

Drone with explosives flown into Israeli territory

► IDF sources revealed that an IDF examination of **the drone flown into Israeli territory** a week ago, which landed near the security fence in the northern Gaza Strip, revealed it **contained explosives**, which did not explode (Ynet, May 27, 2018).

Israel erects a naval barrier along the Gaza Strip border

► On May 27, 2018, the Hamas-affiliated news websites, quoting Israeli media, reported that Israel was beginning the construction of a naval barrier in the northern Gaza Strip. The sites noted that in July 2014 Hamas' military wing carried out a commando operation during which four operatives attacked an IDF base south of the southern Israeli seaside city of Ashqelon (Palinfo and Shehab, May 27, 2018).



**Construction on the naval barrier
(Shehab Facebook page, May 27, 2018).**

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Rafah crossing

► **The Egyptian authorities will allow the Rafah crossing to remain open for the entire month of Ramadan**, especially for the purpose of allowing Palestinians wounded in the "return marches" to go from the Gaza Strip to hospitals in Egypt. The Palestinian national consensus government announced that the aid entering the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing since the beginning of Ramadan is estimated at \$199 thousand. The humanitarian aid has included packages of food and basic commodities, medicines and medical equipment, construction materials, gasoline and diesel fuel. In addition, since the crossing was opened, several thousand people have passed through (Masa, May 25, 2018).



**Humanitarian aid from Egypt enters the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing
(Dar al-Ma'ref on YouTube, May 26, 2018).**

Turkish support for the residents of the Gaza Strip

► **Recep Akdağ, a deputy Turkish prime minister**, interviewed by CNN in Turkish, said that as part of the campaign to support Palestine Turkey had raised the sum of half a million

Turkish pounds (about \$220 thousand). He said Turkey would transfer the aid to the Palestinians through the TIKA agency, AFAD (the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency), **the waqf and the Red Crescent** (al-Anadolu News, May 23, 2018).

► The TIKA agency reported the distribution of food for Ramadan to needy families in the Gaza Strip. Every day it distributes 1,000 portions to break the fast, and has distributed 20,000 packages of food (Twitter account of Tike Palestine, May 22 and 27, 2018). AFAD has transferred \$1.2 million to the World Health Organization representative in the Gaza Strip to provide for medical needs. The funds were presented at a festive ceremony held in the Turkish consulate in Jerusalem (Ma'an, May 28, 2018).



**Packages of food distributed by TIKA in the Gaza Strip
(Twitter account of Tike Palestine and Palinfo, 27, 2018).**

The battle for hearts and minds

The flotilla to the Gaza Strip

► On May 27, 2018, four ships of the flotilla arrived in the **Wilhelmshafen port in northwest Germany** (Twitter account of Charlie Anderson, an *al-Awda* crew member, May 27, 2018). From there the ships expect to sail to **Amsterdam**, reaching it at the beginning of June (Facebook page of the international committee for breaking the siege on the Gaza Strip, May 24, 2018), and reaching **Brighton** on June 5 (Facebook page of the "freedom fleet coalition," May 22, 2018).⁵

⁵For further information, see the May 27, 2018 bulletin, "The Flotilla to the Gaza Strip – Update for May 24, 2018."



The four ships of the flotilla
(Facebook page of Ship to Gaza-Sweden, May 25, 2018).

The "freedom ship" sets sail from the port of Gaza

► The supreme national authority of the return march and lifting the siege held a press conference in the Gaza port. **Salah Abd al-'Ati, coordinator of the "return march's" legal committee**, announced **the sailing of a "freedom ship" from the port of Gaza on May 29, 2018** (close to the anniversary of the *Mavi Marmara* event). The passengers aboard the ship, whose voyage is claimed to be part of the "return march" campaign and a protest against the so-called "siege" of the Gaza Strip, were said to be students, patients and university graduates. The target of the voyage was Cyprus. **Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan** said the purpose of the voyage was to send the world the message of the Palestinian people, who live under a "siege" (al-Aqsa, May 28, 2018). **Note:** The ship was halted by the Israeli navy at noon on May 29, 2018, without confrontation.



The map of the proposed route, from the port of Gaza to Limassol in Cyprus, prepared by the supreme national authority of the return march and lifting the siege (Facebook page of the "the great return march," May 29, 2018).

► At the ceremony held when the ship set sail, **Khaled al-Batsh, coordinator of the supreme national authority of the return march and senior PIJ figure**, said the primary address of responsibility for the siege and suffering is Israel, and that the flotilla is a message to the international community that the time has come to break the "siege" on the Gaza Strip. He called on the international community to defend the ships and passengers participating in the flotilla. To Israel he said, they would not allow Israel to continue to attack the Palestinian people without a response, and the price would be what it would be (alresala.net, May 29, 2018).



The boats set sail
(Twitter account of the Turkish TRT TV channel in Arabic, May 29, 2018)

Miles of Smiles convoy

► **Issam Yusuf, coordinator of the Miles of Smiles convoys,**⁶ said the 34th convoy would enter the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing on June 2, 2018, and remain for a week. He said the activists in the convoy would come from Britain, Belgium, Germany, Algeria, Jordan, Indonesia, Kuwait and a number of charity institutions. The convoy will bring about 18 thousand packages of food, medicine and medical equipment. In addition, members of the convoy will pay the debts of a large number of Palestinians who were imprisoned for debt, visit the wounded of the "return march" in the various hospitals and in their homes and provide them with medical services, and reconstruct a number of houses (Quds Press, May 27, 2018).

⁶**Dr. Issam Salah Mustafa Yusuf (Abu Yusuf)** was the dominant figure in the Interpal Fund, and one of the prominent figures in the financial system in the West that supports Hamas. He was also the founder of The Union of Good and served as its COO. **In recent years he has accompanied Miles of Smiles convoys to the Gaza Strip**, and served as their general coordinator.