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McHale: Blue Berets for Peace Vigil in London

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This column was submitted as a special contribution by Gary McHale and published as received.

Blue Berets for Peace vigil in London

by Gary McHale

David Heap, a UWO professor, and Muhammed Hamou, a teacher, chaplain, and former operations manager at the London Muslim Mosque are part of an international team who attempted to travel to the Gaza Strip aboard a 10-ship flotilla in an attempt to break Israel's blockade of weapons to Hamas. While it was promoted as a humanitarian effort, the trip now appears to have been more about embarrassing Israel than helping people.

While there are true humanitarian disasters in the world, Gaza is not one of those places. In April 2011 Mathilde Redmatn, Deputy Head of the Red Cross stated, "There is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza." Recent news stories tell of how Gaza is opening luxury hotels, a large water park, schools, large malls and how food is abundant. Khalil Hamada, a senior Hamas official with Gaza's Ministry of Justice stated, in June 2010, "There is no starvation in Gaza. No one has died of hunger."

Mark Vandermaas, a Londoner who served in the Mid-East as a United Nations peacekeeper in 1978, has been conducting a daily *Blue Berets for Peace* vigil at the mosque on Oxford St. since June 23rd. to call attention to the fact that the mosque held a fundraising dinner for the Canadian boat to Gaza, which is under the control of Hamas, labelled as a terror organization by the Canadian Government.

Vandermaas states, "I am conducting a series of public protests at the London (Ontario) Muslim Mosque to draw attention to the little-known facts that the state of Israel was created by a 1947 vote of the United Nations General Assembly, and that the UN Committee for Human Rights has condemned the Hamas Charter for its genocidal objectives towards Jews and the state of Israel."

"As a former peacekeeper I feel compelled to defend Israel's right to exist in peace," says Mr. Vandermaas. "The people of London should be concerned that a religious institution in their community such as the London Muslim Mosque is playing a key role in supporting an effort that, if successful, will make it possible for the Hamas terrorist organization to import even more arms for the purpose of carrying out its stated objective of killing Jews and seeing Israel 'obliterated.'" He has also expressed concern for the innocent Palestinians who will suffer if Israel is forced to defend itself against those weapons.

Vandermaas has gained support from local residents and others from Southern Ontario. The Toronto-based Jewish Tribune, Canada's largest Jewish weekly newspaper, and the Toronto Sun's legendary founder Peter Worthington have both covered the story.

Gary Gerofsky, a Jew who traveled from Hamilton to lend his support, said: "Let's step back for a moment and conduct a reality check. When the 8,000-10,000 Jewish inhabitants were pulled out of Gaza by Israel to allow the 1.5 million Muslims a Jew-free terror enclave - Israel expected the move would create an opportunity for peace. Instead, the Palestinians destroyed their own economy by destroying green houses that were left behind because they were built by Jews. They also got involved in a bloody civil war over power between the two main factions, Hamas and Fatah, with the more extremist and militant Hamas the victor."

Jacob Peretz, from the London Jewish community, stated, "After absorbing thousands of rockets on its people and homes near the Gaza border, Israel implemented a blockade to prevent Hamas from acquiring even more sophisticated weapons into their territory and use it against Israel. There is nothing illegal in preventing murderers from trying to kill your people. If these activists really want to help the Gazans, they should not support this terrorist monster, Hamas, as it is ruthless against anybody not going their way, even the people of Gaza."

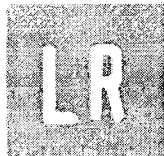
The National Post reported that the "United Nation Inquiry on last year's Gaza flotilla incident aboard the Mavi Marmara found that Israel's blockade of Hamas-ruled Gaza is legal and the Israeli government owes no apology or reparation to Turkey."

During the 1962 Cuban missile crisis the USA created a blockade to stop nuclear weapons from being installed. Imagine if the French-owned islands of *Saint-Pierre* & Miquelon off the coast Newfoundland were shelling towns in Canada. Do people really believe Canada would not have the right to stop arms from being delivered to these Islands? Similarly, are we to believe Israel is not permitted to protect itself from missiles launched by a terror group whose charter calls for the death of Jews?

Canadians need to stand up for peace, and not find ways to encourage violence.

Gary McHale is the Executive Director of Canadian Advocates for Charter Equality. His civil rights work in the Caledonia crisis was featured in Christie Blatchford's 2010 book, *Helpless: Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear And Anarchy, And How The Law Failed All Of Us*.

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