

# An open letter to Israel

## From: Lauren Booth, UK

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“This morning I set out to write a piece about the looting of the aid Flotilla to Gaza, by your soldiers. As you may have read, an Israel Defense Forces officer, has been remanded by a military court, suspected of stealing laptop computers from passengers.

Interestingly, Haretz newspaper, now refers to the fleet as an ‘aid flotilla.’ Which it was. Rather than the ‘terror’ fleet your leaders would have had you call it. But I digress.

So, there I was, all ready to write my piece, when I came across an article on ynetnews. It sought to spell out the shock perhaps felt by some about the looted goods. A senior Israel Defense Forces officer said of the flotilla thefts: ‘there must be a serious problem in the IDF in terms of values.’

I looked at those words for a long time. And, instead of writing my piece, decided to write to you instead. Because I can’t help wondering, who on earth still has any reserves of ‘shock’ to spare for the behaviour of your military? I mean really, come on guys. Beyond the comfortable avenues of Tel Aviv, the rest of the world finds the phrase ‘Moral Army,’ when applied to the IDF, nothing short of a huge, (sadly catastrophic), global sized joke. One on the same level as, say, climate change denial or George Bush’s presidency.

Now, here I’ve done it again. I’ve made you really mad at me. But please, just give me a moment or two to explain why I’m writing this letter. Because I didn’t set out to, nor do I want to insult you. Certainly not anymore than I have in the past. I’m sat here with washing up undone and housework piling up, to ask you one question. As a mother and as a fellow human being I need to know why you don’t see the evil that’s being done in your name?

How can you not see?

As you may already know, I was on the first Freegaza mission in 2008. This means that I not only have the pleasure of knowing personally

the fine ladies who founded the FGM (Freegaza Movement). It also means that I had many friends and colleagues on the Flotilla that your military attacked in May. You know, (again just for a second see me as a mum and not an 'enemy') not one of those fine people is a terrorist, wanting to run weapons to 'extremists'. They are to a man (and to a woman) kind, concerned citizens of the world. People, who simply cannot go about their normal daily lives whilst your state, your army, your settlers torment other human beings. Every minute of every day. Of every month. Of every year.

For sixty two years.

I don't mean to be rude guys. But there comes a time when saying 'I didn't know what was going on' wears a bit thin. You know what I mean? This whole charade about being 'shocked' by your soldiers bad behavior, it makes non Israeli's, well, it makes us laugh. .

Because, this weeks looting by your soldiers, it's not the first of its kind. is it? Come on. Think back. There have been an awful, awful lot of others. Forgotten? Let me help you. Get to a computer and type the words 'IDF looting' into googles search engine. You may (or may not be surprised) when this search produces more than 64,000 results. Now before you go off the deep end, crying 'our enemies are telling lies about us.' Please, I beg you. Read just some of the results on the first page. It won't take you long. Okay why not spend the whole morning reading them? After all it's kind of your duty to know what's being done in your name isn't it? I mean, when military crimes are being committed with YOUR tax shekels, you have a right to know.

One of the google results reveals that an Israel Defense Forces soldier confessed to stealing a credit card from a home in northern Gaza during Operation Cast Lead. Remember that? The soldier in the Givati infantry unit's reconnaissance battalion used it to withdraw NIS 1,600 in Israel. A small criminal act.Part of a much wider crime.

A crime against humanity, that you've been either ignoring. Or have been deliberately blinded to by your leaders. As I have already said though, you have access to the internet, you don't have to remain in the darkness. Unless of course you're comfortable there.

The most recent looting by the IDF of civilian goods, made me think of the Al Samouni women, I met them last year, on the rubble of their homes in Al Zaytoun (I've attached some photos for you to see). You

may, vaguely recognize that name 'Al Samouni'. Let me jog your memory. On Saturday, 3 January 2009, the Israeli incursion into Al Zaytoun neighbourhood began. The following day, on 4 January 2009, your forces bombed the same area. On Monday at 7:00 Am, 5 January 2009, again your forces bombed the very same area of Hay (neighborhood) Al Zaytoun. One of the missiles struck the third floor of Tallal Hilmi Al Samouni's home. Then came the soldiers shooting to kill.

Overall, 26 members of the Al Samouni family were killed, including 10 children and 7 women. The Red Cross was only allowed entry three days later to evacuate the dead and injured, the majority of whom were so critical that they were taken to Belgium, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia for treatment.

Allow me, if you don't mind to give you their names as you probably don't know them. As kind human beings, I'm sure you'll wish to pay them your respects, and perhaps pray for them.

#### Names of children killed

- Azza Salah Al Samouni, 3 years of age
- Waleed Rashad Al Samouni, 17 years of age
- Ishaq Ibrahim Al Samouni, 14 years of age
- Ismail Ibrahim Al Samouni, 16 years of age
- Rifka Wael Al Samouni, 8 years of age
- Fares Wael Al Samouni, 12 years of age
- Huda Nael Al Samouni, 17 years of age
- Ahmad Atieh Al Samouni, 14 years of age
- Mu'tassim Mohammed Al Samouni, 6 years of age
- Mohammed Hilmi Al Samouni, 5 years of age

#### Names of Women Killed

- Rahma Mohammed Al Samouni, 50 years of age
- Safa' Hilmi Al Samouni, 25 years of age
- Maha Mohammed Al Samouni, 22 years of age
- Rabbab Azzat Al Samouni, 32 years of age
- Laila Nabih Al Samouni, 40 years of age
- Rifqa Mohammed Al Samouni, 50 years of age
- Hannan Khamis Al Samouni, 36 years of age

#### Names of Men Killed

- Tallal Hilmi Al Samouni, 55 years of age
- Attieh Hilmi Al Samouni, 25 years of age
- Rashad Hilmi Al Samouni, 42 years of age

- Tawfiq Rashad Al Samouni, 23 years of age
- Mohammed Ibrahim, 26 years of age
- Ziyad Izzat Al Samouni, 28 years of age
- Nidal Ahmad Al Samouni, 30 years of age
- Hamdi Maher Al Samouni, 23 years of age
- Hamdi Mahmoud Al Samouni, 70 years of age

Last March I was shown around the rubble of their community by the surviving women and children. I saw the racist graffiti left behind on the walls of the room where a teenage girl still had to sleep. Left for her by your ‘Moral Army’ no less. It said in places in Hebrew, in places English stuff like ‘we’ll be back’ and there was a coarse cartoon of a house exploding with the words ‘you are here’ wittily added. A beautiful young woman, told me of how she was about to get married before the attack. Her family had saved several thousand dollars for her dowry (many people of one family saving for a very, very long time, as you can imagine). It had been hidden under a bed in a suitcase for the happy event. Her mother had a few ancient pieces of jewellery that had been passed down through the generations in gold as well. Well, you see, your soldiers, bombed these people, then shot their children, then finally looted everything the survivors owned. I swear to you, look on google, look into your own hearts, you know, this happens.

You know this is how your army deliberately treats Palestinians.

Before you scream ‘lies!’ or ‘anti semite!’ please, I beg you. Parent to parent. Human to human. in the name of the God of all faiths, take a breathe, suspend your disbelief a while longer, then read on. Because, oh Israel. What if, just suppose, I’m not the anti semite your wiki trained extremist supporters try to paint me as? And what if, just ten per cent of the 64,000 google entries for “IDF looting” are utterly true? What then? What does that make you complicit in? What will you do if just for a second the truth that the rest of the world sees about your leaders barbarism fills your mind and your hearts as it one day surely must?

My words, as an outsider will no doubt seem harsh, even naive. This then, is from today’s Jerusalem Post:

“According to information analyzed by the human rights organization Yesh Din, between September 2000 and the end of 2009, less than six percent of nearly 2,000 investigations opened against IDF soldiers suspected of crimes against Palestinians ended in indictments. During the same period, according to various estimates, thousands of Palestinian

civilians were killed as a result of IDF activities. How many of these fatalities resulted in convictions? Four. Not four percent – just four.

”It’s becoming increasingly clear that your young men and women are being trained to behave like animals. These events, the looting, the photos posted online by Eden Abergil, they can’t be explained away as ‘one off’’s any longer.

It’s for you to ask yourselves what they mean. I’m truly sorry if my words have offended you. I just wanted to talk with you directly for once. By the way there are an estimated 400 laptops, 600 mobile phones plus other personal cash and effects, which your military still has not returned to the passengers of the aid flotilla. You see, when then they set sail. For some reason, those good people, didn’t think the IDF would steal from them.

Yours in Hope  
Lauren Booth