

NGO in talks with Malta to repair Gaza-bound aid ship attacked by Israel



The vessel Conscience had been seeking to deliver aid including food and medicines to the besieged enclave [Darrin Zammit Lupis/Reuters]

Valletta, May 5 (RHC)-- An international NGO that intends to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza by sea has said it was in talks with Malta's government about allowing a vessel to enter Maltese waters to repair damage caused by a drone attack.

The ship named Conscience, operated by the Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC), suffered damage to its front section including a loss of power when it was hit by two drones just outside Maltese territorial waters in the central Mediterranean early on Friday, the NGO said on Sunday.

The coalition, an international non-governmental group, said Israel, which has blockaded and bombarded Gaza, was to blame for the incident.

The Conscience, which set off from Tunisia, had been waiting to take on board some 30 peace activists from around the world before trying to sail to Gaza in the eastern Mediterranean. The ship had been seeking to deliver aid including food and medicines to the besieged enclave, where aid groups warn people are struggling to survive following a two-month total blockade by Israel.

Swedish activist Greta Thunberg said she was in Valletta, the capital of Malta, and had been planning to board the ship as part of the flotilla.

Prime Minister Robert Abela said on Sunday that Malta was prepared to assist the ship with necessary repairs so that it could continue on its journey, once it was satisfied that the vessel held only humanitarian aid.

Coalition officials said on Sunday that the ship was in no danger of sinking, but that they wanted to be sure it would be safe from further attacks while undergoing repairs, and able to sail out again.

Earlier on Sunday, the coalition had accused Malta of impeding access to its ship. Malta denied the claim, saying the crew had refused assistance and even refused to allow a surveyor on board to assess the damage.

"The FFC would like to clarify our commitment to engagement with [Maltese] authorities to expedite the temporary docking of our ship for repairs and surveyors, so we can continue on the urgent humanitarian mission to Gaza," the coalition said in a statement later in the day.

A Malta government spokesman said its offer was to assist in repairs out at sea once the boat's cargo was verified to be aid.

Coalition officials said the surveyor was welcome to board as part of a deal being negotiated with Malta.

Israel halted humanitarian aid to Gaza two months ago, shortly before it broke a ceasefire and restarted its war against Hamas, which has devastated the Palestinian enclave and killed more than 51,000 people.

Another NGO ship on a similar mission to Gaza in 2010 was stopped and boarded by Israeli troops, and nine activists were killed. Other such ships have similarly been stopped and boarded, with activists arrested.

Hamas issued a statement about the incident off Malta, accusing Israel of "piracy" and "state terrorism."

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA and REUTERS]

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/382145-ngo-in-talks-with-malta-to-repair-gaza-bound-aid-ship-attacked-by-israel>



Radio Habana Cuba