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**Jewish Community Relations Council**

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# MEDIA RELEASE

## STATEMENT ON THE GAZA FLOTILLA TRAGEDY

**San Francisco, May 31, 2010:** The Jewish Community Relations Council, the public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community, issued the following statement in the wake of today's terrible incident at sea:

The JCRC is profoundly saddened by the loss of life in this incident. Our hearts and prayers go out to the families of the dead and the wounded.

News is still filtering out as to what occurred on one of the six ships the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) boarded that were running the maritime blockade of the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. With growing evidence, it appears that there is much more to this incident than was initially reported.

- We urge the media and the public to await the facts and not rush to judgment by assuming that this was a situation of the IDF attacking defenseless "peace activists." There is evidence from video clips that when Israeli soldiers began to board the ship, one by one as they rappelled down a rope onto the deck, well-trained fighters armed with knives, axes, clubs, firebombs, concussion grenades and firearms attacked them. In the initial videos, Israeli soldiers are seen being clubbed and stabbed, and there is no evidence of any Israeli use of live ammunition until after this occurred.
- Under international law, Israel has every right to act in its own defense, including by intercepting these ships. Israel had warned the flotilla repeatedly not to try to land in Gaza, but the flotilla leaders chose to ignore the warnings.
- Israeli soldiers suffered serious wounds, including gunshot and stab wounds and at least one soldier, who was flung from an upper deck some 30 feet to a lower deck, suffered a severe concussion. At least one soldier jumped overboard to save his life.
- There is evidence that the IDF soldiers opened fire because they legitimately feared for their lives from the shipboard fighters prepared for battle. Those attacking the Israeli soldiers were not peace activists and should not be permitted to hide behind that phrase.

- Gaza flotilla spokesperson Greta Berlin acknowledged that the primary goal of the flotilla organizers was political, not humanitarian, telling AFP on May 27, "This mission is not about delivering humanitarian supplies, it's about breaking Israel's siege" on Gaza.
- There are many serious questions about the role of the Turkish Islamist humanitarian aid group, the IHH, in provoking the violence. The IHH is anti-American, is a strong supporter of Hamas, has a presence in Gaza and is working closely with Hamas in coordinating aid flotillas designed to provoke confrontation.
- The purpose of the blockade is to prevent rearmament of the Gaza Strip, which is controlled by Hamas, a radical Islamist terrorist group that openly seeks the destruction of Israel. Hamas seized control of Gaza in a violent coup ousting the Palestinian Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas, and launched scores of suicide attacks on Israeli civilians, killing hundreds over the years, and fired thousands of rockets into Israeli towns such as Sderot, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Beer Sheba among others.

There is much more to be learned, and in the coming days more information will be forthcoming. We expect that the Israeli government will undertake a full investigation of this episode and the procedures its military employed and determine how best to exercise its right and duty to protect its population in similar situations in the future while minimizing the risk of loss of life. This tragedy emphasizes again the need for new momentum in the peace process leading to an end of the conflict.