



MEDIA RELEASE **7 November 2011**

ECAJ President rebukes Rhiannon over Gaza comments

Greens NSW Senator Lee Rhiannon today issued a statement calling on the Israeli government “to immediately release Michael Coleman”, an Australian member of the Freedom Waves to Gaza Flotilla, who has been arrested by the Israeli Defence Force. "I have also asked the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to work hard to ensure Mr Coleman is safe and is released without delay," Senator Rhiannon said. "It is the Israeli Defence Forces that have acted illegally as the boat Mr Coleman and other Freedom Waves participants were on was in international waters when intercepted.

Senator Rhiannon added: "The United Nations Human Rights Council Inquiry Report of September 2010 found that the Israeli blockade of Gaza is illegal. It is time to end it once and for all”.

The President of the ECAJ, Dr Danny Lamm, issued Rhiannon with a stinging rebuke. “As usual when it comes to Israel, Senator Rhiannon has blundered badly. She is wrong on the facts and wrong on the law. There is not a skerrick of evidence that Michael Coleman is in any danger, as she has implied.” Dr Lamm said.

“Senator Rhiannon’s characterisation of the blockade of Gaza and the boarding of vessels that are used to break the blockade as “illegal” is mendacious nonsense, as will be immediately understood by anyone who has read the Palmer Report. Unlike Senator Rhiannon, Sir Geoffrey Palmer of New Zealand, is an expert in international maritime law.” Dr Lamm said. “Palmer and other legal experts, Alvaro Uribe (Colombia), Joseph Ciechanover Itzhar (Israel) and Süleyman Özdem Sanberk (Turkey), investigated this issue earlier in the year. They concluded that Israel’s naval blockade of Gaza is legal, describing it as a legitimate security measure in response to the real threat posed by terrorists in Gaza.”

“The experts also concluded that ships that are being used for the purpose of breaking the blockade may lawfully be boarded and commandeered by Israeli forces, even in international waters.” Dr Lamm added.

“It is ludicrous to suggest that this latest attempt to break the blockade is necessary to bring medical supplies to Gaza”, Dr Lamm stated. “More than 30,000 tons of supplies are transported into Gaza from Israel every week, including at least 5 truckloads of medical supplies. The people who want to break the blockade are not interested in providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians. If that was their fundamental aim, they could send their supplies in by land via Israel. Their main purpose is to harm Israel and her people”, Dr Lamm concluded.

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Rhiannon’s statement can be accessed at:

<http://lee-rhiannon.greensmps.org.au/content/media-release/call-govt-action-on-australian-detained-israel>