

## Malaysian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Humanitarian Issues in Gaza, Palestine

### Oraganisasi Bukan Kerajaan dan Isu-isu Kemanusiaan Di Gaza, Palestin

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#### **Abstract**

Since Israel's blockade and the Operation Casting Lead (OCL) in the Gaza Strip, many international NGOs have come forward to render help and lessen the plight of the Palestinians. For the Malaysian NGOs, particularly Aman Palestin and Lifeline4Gaza, easing the burden of the Palestinians is a responsibility that must be shared. Although these two groups applied different approaches, with Aman Palestin using the land route of the Rafah crossing and the Lifeline4Gaza joining the international flotillas, the same goals are being pursued: to help the people of Palestine to be safe and free. To some extent, the rise of many NGOs in championing the issue of human rights at the international level has been considered as a challenge for the state. The continuous reaction of NGOs challenging the state on the issue of human rights has indirectly furthered the rivalry in the discipline of international relations, namely 'state actor versus non-state actors (or NGOs)'. Without relying on the influence of the powerful states, many international NGOs have successfully managed to show to the world that they can do things that states 'cannot do'. By using more diplomatic ways (delivering humanitarian aid), and not in the form of terrorism, this has been found to be more effective to tell the world leaders of the sufferings of the Gaza people. Nevertheless, in the case of Malaysia, it can be argued that both the state and non-state actors (Malaysian NGOs) are co-operating well in promoting the issue of human rights internationally. Both are supporting each other to ensure the mission and the vision of helping the Palestinians becomes a reality.

**Keywords :** *Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Malaysian NGOs, Humanitarian, Gaza, Palestine*

## **Abstrak**

Sejak teretusnya tragedi *Operation Casting Lead* (OCL) dan sekatan kejam Rejim Zionis terhadap komuniti Gaza, Palestin, telah menyebabkan banyak Organisasi Bukan Kerajaan (NGO) antarabangsa bertindak untuk membantu meringankan penderitaan mereka ini. Senario ini, tidak terkecuali juga bagi pihak NGO Malaysia yang turut sama terlibat dalam memberikan bantuan kemanusiaan terhadap rakyat Palestin. Dengan memberikan fokus kepada dua pergerakan NGO Malaysia iaitu Aman Palestin dan Lifeline4Gaza, kajian ini telah dapat mengenalpasti bahawa walaupun kedua-duanya menggunakan pendekatan yang berbeza, iaitu Aman Palestin lebih cenderung untuk menggunakan perjalanan darat melalui sempadan Rafah-Gaza, Mesir, manakala Lifeline4Gaza menyertai flotila antarabangsa, tetapi mereka mempunyai matlamat yang sama iaitu untuk membebaskan penderitaan masyarakat Gaza dan rakyat Palestin keseluruhannya daripada cengkaman Rejim Zionis. Pada dasarnya, ketrampilan aktif pihak NGO dalam menjayakan misi kemanusiaan di Gaza telah mencabar *status quo* terhadap peranan sesebuah negara, khususnya negara-negara yang berpengaruh, dalam membela nilai-nilai kemanusiaan sejagat. Pergerakan NGO ini telah dapat membuktikan bahawa mereka mampu membuat sesuatu tatkala negara-negara berpengaruh hanya memerhatikan sahaja nilai kemanusiaan dirokek dengan kejam oleh Rejim Zionis di Gaza, Palestin. Dengan menggunakan kaedah diplomatik iaitu memberikan bantuan kemanusiaan kepada masyarakat Palestin yang tertindas telah memberikan suatu kesedaran kepada para pemimpin dunia betapa menderitanya rakyat Palestin pada ketika ini. Bagi kerajaan Malaysia pula, usaha untuk membantu rakyat Palestin telah lama diperjuangkan. Bantuan yang diberikan adalah pelbagai termasuklah dari segi penghormatan diplomatik dan sokongan sosio-ekonomi yang tidak berbelah-bagi. Oleh yang demikian, dalam konteks hubungan negara dan aktor bukan negara bagi kajian kes ini, tidak wujud persaingan antara kerajaan dan pihak NGO kerana kedua-duanya telah menunjukkan komitmen dan sokongan yang padu terhadap rakyat Palestin untuk memastikan impian mereka mencapai kemerdekaan dan kebebasan akan terlaksana pada suatu hari nanti.

***Kata Kunci : Organisasi Bukan Kerajaan (NGO), NGO Malaysia, Kemanusiaan, Gaza, Palestin***

## 1 Introduction

A great deal of discussion has been held on the current activities of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in promoting human rights issues in the international political system. Without doubt these days NGOs are playing leading roles in championing human rights issues. The roles they play vary from having a mass movement and posting a street demonstration to giving humanitarian aid to the 'oppressed' people. In unexpected situations, there are a few groups which are viewed relatively as extreme or terrorist groups that will use force to deliver their strong message to the targeted parties. The current role of these NGOs has forced the states to be more concerned with the human rights issues. Indirectly, this scenario has challenged the status quo of the states as the main protector of human rights issues as well as the main actor in the international political system.

Most of the arguments (Gleason, 2005, Forte, 2002) on the feature of the international political system believe that since the tragedy of September 11 2001, the world has changed abruptly. The world was having tough times in coping with the issues of terrorism. For now, within the context of the global war on terror propagated by the former US President, George W. Bush, the war on terror (and the conflict) seemed to gradually shift from an interstate war to a 'state vs. non-state actor's war'. The term non-state actor or NSA here is closely linked to the extremist and terrorist groups which claimed to be responsible for the tragedy of September 11. On the other hand, the role of the state as the chief protector of human rights issues is also currently being challenged by another group of Non-State Actors (NSAs). This has been said before by referring to the diplomatic role played by certain or some NGOs in promoting human rights issues globally. In other words, since post-September 11, the world has faced two different new challenges posed by NSAs that engulfed the superiority of states concerned with the security and human rights issues. Firstly, the security of state was threatened by a few extremists and terrorist groups which were targeting certain countries by the use of force for they believed in giving unfair and unequal treatment to other groups of people. Secondly, the international reputation of the state was put on hold by several NGOs which seemed to replace the main task of the states in giving humanitarian aid to the oppressed or the needy people. The most important thing to note here was that the rise of NSAs, specifically referring to both extremist - terrorist groups and NGOs in challenging the states, was because they were showing their frustration to the states for their failure and ineffectiveness in resolving the problems of the needy people.

Therefore, the main task of this study is to address the above issues. The study, however, will be focusing only on the second challenge, that is, the role of NGOs (as one of the NSAs) in giving humanitarian aid to the needy people by concentrating on the role of Malaysian NGOs in helping the Palestinians in Gaza. The reason for this is that the study believes that using diplomacy rather than force in helping needy people is probably more effective. Besides, using Malaysian NGOs, as the case example will to some extent reveal, the tendencies of both state and NGOs to mutually co-operate rather than challenge each other in helping the Palestinians.

In discussing this further, the study will begin first with the background of the emergence of NGOs, and their roles in the international political system. This will be followed by explaining the worsening scenario in Gaza which successfully attracts a lot of NGOs and the role of the Malaysian NGOs in helping the community of Gaza. To do this, two groups of Malaysian NGOs will be analyzed: 'Aman Palestine' and 'Lifeline4Gaza'. The focus on these two groups is because they centre solely on Palestine's struggle and both have applied different approaches in helping the Palestinians (especially the Gaza community). By focusing on them, an analysis on the various roles played by the Malaysian NGOs and the complex relations between the state and NGOs will be better understood. However, this will not exclude other Malaysian NGOs entirely. The study will indicate their contributions wherever applicable because they are also part and parcel of the humanitarian aid activities.

## **2. The Emergence and the Roles of NGOs in the International Political System**

In the field of International Relations, the main actors in the international political system are commonly divided into two; state and non-state actors. Before that, however, state had been overwhelmingly claimed as the only actor in the international political system. This was largely due to the preponderant influence of the realist paradigm<sup>1</sup> since post-World War II which firmly argued that the state was the main actor in global politics. Most of the issues discussed were usually associated with the state such as the sovereignty of state, the question of anarchy, the international structure of power, the security dilemma within the context of state on state conflict, and others (Jackson & Sorensen 2007, Kegley & Wittkopf 1997, Smith, Booth & Zalewski ed. 1996, Holsti 1995, Waltz 1954).

Nevertheless, since the publication of Keohane and Nye's (1977 & 1989) work, it has paved the way for the discussion of the emergence of new actors in the international political system. These new actors are closely referred to as the transnational actors who interact in the form of transnational and trans governmental relations that lead to the creation of international cooperation, and subsequently to the establishment of a new sub-discipline called the International Political Economy (IPE) under the banner of neo-liberal institutionalism. (Moravscik 2009 & Milner 2009). Although they are more economic in nature akin to international trade and monetary policy, farm policy, international trade union federations and others, but also included transnational non-governmental groups (both revolutionary and reformist), religious groups and mass communication interactions. In other words, what is more significant with the work of Keohane & Nye is that, this has opened new doors for fresh discussions of the emerging role of 'other actors' or what has been called 'Non-State Actors'

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<sup>1</sup> Realist paradigm is one the main school of thoughts in International Relations. Others, for instance, include liberal-idealist, Marxist (and neo-Marxist), feminist, critical theory, and constructivist. For further explanation see Robert Jackson & Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations : Theories and Approaches*, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2007), Charles W. Kegley & Eugene R. Wittkopf, *World Politics : Trend and Transformation*, (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1997), Steve Smith, Ken Booth & Marysia Zalewski ed., *International Theory : Positivism & Beyond*, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1996), and others.

(NSAs) in the International Relations discipline. Their idea is also still relevant today when more and more new NSAs have emerged and become active in the global world and also posed strong challenges to the state. They are not only active in giving voice to unequal distribution of world economy but also on environmental degradation and human rights issues. (Kegley & Wittkopf 1997, Reinisch 2005, Moravcsik 2009 & Milner 2009).

These NSAs too have been largely divided into two groups; they are international intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and transnational or international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The first group consists of the non-state actors that are created by nation-states. They are voluntary associations of sovereign states established to pursue many objectives, such as which states want to cooperate through a sort of formal structure and which states are unable to realize for themselves. Among the exemplars of IGOs are the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and others. The second group is established not by nation-states, but by certain group of individuals, businessmen, donor-organized, transnational social movement and other societal forces. They are for instance, multinational corporations (MNCs), religious and humanitarian group, terrorist group and other types of NGOs (Ataman, 2003, Geeraerts, 2009). For the purpose of this study, the second group, that is, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), by specifically referring to the role of humanitarian group in championing human rights, will become the main subject of discussion.

As has been defined earlier, NGOs are institutions that are established by non-state actors or at least one side of these organizations is not state. They have no legal bonds with the states, therefore they are truly transnational. They are many kinds of NGOs such as transnational social movement, business and industry, donor-organized, people's organization and others. Speaking about their roles in the international political system, they are, in fact, enormous and diverse. Even their numbers have increased, and their effectiveness for transnational politics has become more relevant in recent decades. They have become crucial partners in international politics and as such, being one of the determining factors in formulating a state's foreign policy (Ataman, 2003, Geeraerts, 2009).

In contrast with the role of IGOs which is usually depicted as the instrument of states in achieving or safeguarding their interests, the role of NGOs could be considerably functional both to facilitate inter-state co-operation as well as to challenge the status-quo of the state. This is because NGOs are created by non-state actors and they have no legal bond with the states. Therefore, they have more options on how to 'counterbalance' the influence of the states. In other words, the role of NGOs in the international system is entirely dependent on their nature and vision. If for instance, those NGOs which are primarily formed on the basis of economic-commercial orientation like Multinational Corporations (MNCs), most of their efforts will be geared towards obtaining profit maximization by effectively influencing, or even directing a state's economic foreign policy, so on and so forth (Ataman, 2003, Geeraerts, 2009).

In the case of this study, the NGOs which will be the focus are those with humanitarian orientation. Basically, the most fundamental role of humanitarian NGOs is to monitor human rights practices of states and examples of coercive foreign interventions. These days, states are now obliged to obey transnational and international formal and informal legal and political constraints on their human rights practices. States have to take into consideration international and transnational public opinion on human rights (Ataman, 2003). This is because they have for so long, been pictured as the protector of their unit, society. Any incompetence or ignorance of this noble role will spur a group of humanitarian NGOs to step in. This is what had happened in Gaza when the people of this territory had suffered for ages at the hands of the Israeli government. A cruel and inhuman blockade was imposed against them. They were experiencing international isolation, malnutrition, starvation, and at the same time, countless innocent lives had also been brutally taken. Concerned with the worsening condition in Gaza, and the states' (especially powerful states) continuous passive behaviour towards this incident, a few groups of humanitarian NGOs including Malaysian NGOs, had come forward to take up this role. They had launched several humanitarian projects to end the sufferings of the community of Gaza, by the delivery of humanitarian aid. Their vision is clear; to tell the world states' leaders that something must be done in Gaza.

### **3. The Worsening Situation in Gaza**

Generally, life in Gaza has been deteriorating since the Israeli blockade in 2007. The people of Gaza (and also the Palestinians in the West Bank) are currently being surrounded by walls and barriers erected by the Zionist regime (Usher, 2005). They seem to be living in an open-air prison. The blockade had left more than 1.4 million Palestinian men, women and children trapped in the Gaza Strip, an area of land just 40 kilometres long and 9.5 kilometres wide. It suffocated the economy and drove people further into poverty. Out of the total population of Gaza, 1.1 million were living as refugees.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, some 80 per cent of Gazans were forced to depend on international humanitarian aid, and the rate of unemployment has doubled to more than 40 per cent. For instance, there were about 110,000 workers previously employed in the private sector, but after the blockade 75,000 workers lost their jobs. Meanwhile, the current condition of health has also deteriorated terribly. Many young people, and newly born babies need more medications (Blomfield, 2011, Ezzat, 2011, The Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, 2010, Amnesty International, 2010, *Social Justice News*, Salt of the Earth, 2008).

Moreover, the Gazans are also struggling for access to clean water which is routed from the coastal aquifer (both Palestine and Israel share two ground water basins along the Mediterranean

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<sup>2</sup>According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, most of the refugees were living in eight camps; Jabalia, Khan Younis, Rafah, Bureij, Beach, Maghazi, Nuseirat, and Deir al-Balah. See Mariam Itani & Mo'in Manna, "The Suffering of the Palestinian Refugee" (translated by Salma al-Houry) in Dr. Mohsen Moh'dSaleh & Rana Sa'adah (ed.), *Am I not a Human?* (Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Zaytouna Centre, 2010), p. 43.

coastline of both political entities<sup>3</sup>). It is not that the Gaza Strip has inadequate water resources but the quality of water is unfit for domestic and agricultural consumption. This is largely caused by long-term overexploitation which resulted to high levels of salinity and nitrate pollution. With the rapid growth of population, roughly 3.8 per cent, it is a tall order for the Gazans to merely depend on one single water source (Sar Sour & Omran, 2011, Weinthal, Vengosh, Marei, Gutierrez, & Kloppmann, 2005).

Apart from the blockade, the political tension between Fatah (PLO) and Hamas, particularly in the post-legislative Election 2006 (which was won by Hamas), also further affected the situation in Gaza. Both parties had different methods and strategies in winning the hearts of all the Palestinian people. The relentless tussle between them unfortunately brought about a military conflict known as the 'Battle of Gaza' that took place between 7 and 15 June 2007. The aftermath of the battle created two separate political administrations in which Hamas took over the Gaza Strip and Fatah, however, still managed to keep the West Bank close to its chest. Besides that, the recently leaked document indicating Palestinian National Authority (PNA) led by Fatah offered far-reaching territorial concessions in Jerusalem to the regime of Israel, had further prolong their disagreements (Toameh 2011).

Nonetheless, without denying that the Israeli's decision to launch a military offensive on Gaza known as Operation Casting Lead (OCL) that lasted 22 days (from December 27, 2008 to 18 January, 2009) was the turning point of the brutal treatment of the Israeli regime towards the people of Gaza. The OCL had not only killed more than 1,400 Palestinians, but according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) which hosted the UN Shelter Cluster reported that at least 3,600 shelters were also completely destroyed and displaced around 21,000 people including an estimated 10,500 children. In addition, the OCL also further damaged 280 (some said 250 schools) of the 641 schools in Gaza (Editor, Journal of Palestine Studies 2009, Naffa' 2009, Hogan 2009, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights 2010).

The tragic incident of OCL had immediately brought a call from Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations (PNGO) to stop the violence, and also urged both Fatah and Hamas to reconcile for the benefit of the whole Palestine society (Issacharoff, 2011, Bajec, 2011). Not only that, this incident had brought further the attention of the international human

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<sup>3</sup> According to Weinthal, Vengosh, Marei, Gutierrez, & Kloppmann, Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) share two ground water basins in which one party is upstream and the other is down stream : the coastal aquifer and the Western Mountain aquifer. In the Western Mountain aquifer, the PA (West Bank) is the upstream user and Israel is the downstream user. In contrast, Hamas-Gaza is the downstream user in the coastal aquifer as the ground water flow from the eastern part of the aquifer within Israeli territory toward the Gaza Strip. The downstream of Hamas-Gaza places it at a physical disadvantage vis-à-vis its upstream neighbor, Israel, since the party that holds the upstream advantage can de facto determine the quantity and quality of the water flow for the downstream user. E, Weinthal, A. Vengosh, A. Marei, A. Gutierrez, & W. Kloppmann, "The Water Crisis in the Gaza Strip : Prospects for Resolution", *Ground Water*, Sept-Oct. 2005, vol. 43, no. 5, p. 653.

rights NGOs to call strongly for the Israelis to stop the aggression. These international human rights NGOs, including the Malaysian NGOs (which will be discussed later), also launched a flotilla called 'The Gaza Freedom Flotilla' on May 31, 2010 to send humanitarian aid to break Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. The flotilla was organized by the Free Gaza Movement and the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (İHH).<sup>4</sup> It had successfully shown the world, particularly to Israel, that all humanitarian NGOs have a role to play in Palestine.

#### **4. The NGOs' Humanitarian Activities in Palestine**

By looking back to the early involvement of humanitarian NGOs in Palestine, the launch of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla was not the first humanitarian NGOs assignment in this conflicting territory. In fact, since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, which was in conjunction with the declaration of UN Human Rights Principle, more and more NGOs have come forward to help the Palestinians. In other words, NGOs were not a new phenomenon in Palestine. Since the absence of a state in Palestine, NGOs have been playing an important part in looking after the Palestinians. For instance, the NGO sectors have contributed 60% for health care, 100% for agriculture, and 30% for educational institutions, mostly kindergartens (Jensen 2005).

The types of NGOs in Palestine vary according to the needs and the ideologies they advocate. During the 1970s at least three main types of NGOs emerged, especially in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They were the nationalist, Marxist, and Islamic oriented groups. With the exception of Islamist NGOs (which were outside the PLO, and acquired financial means mainly from zakat collection in Palestine and through sister organizations in diaspora), most of these NGOs were affiliated and rooted in the various PLO factions. They were especially related to the left-wing factions, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Communist Party or currently known as Palestine Peoples Party (Jensen, 2005).

The method of the NGOs pursuing their causes was largely based on the professional bodies they were representing such as the teachers, writers, labour unionists, journalists, lawyers, medical associations, engineers, chambers of commerce, farmers (agriculture committee), and other charitable organizations (Brown 2003). Furthermore, it was difficult to clearly quantify the actual number of Palestine NGOs but according to the study of Carapico (2000), there were about 400 NGOs actively helping the Palestinians. It was also estimated that about 10-40 per cent of all these NGOs were Islamic-oriented (Roy 2000).

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, this is not the first time the Free Gaza Movement and İHH organized a humanitarian ship to Gaza. There were eight international humanitarian trips that were launched before. See "Passengers", (<http://www.freegaza.org/en/boat-trips/passenger-lists>).

In general, the main struggle of NGOs in Palestine was geared towards the issue of national liberation against the Israeli occupation, and also to provide basic services like health, shelter, food and education. Nevertheless, since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993,<sup>5</sup> most of the NGOs have been de-linked from the issue of liberation and almost exclusively deal with development issues. This is what Jensen (2005) was referring to the development of secular Palestinian NGOs, not the Islamists and those NGOs that opposed the peace process, which have given more focus on development issues since the post-Oslo period. However based on Roy's work (2000), there is an emphasis of the Islamist groups, especially Hamas, to pay more attention on socio-cultural reform and community development work.<sup>6</sup>

The shift towards developmental issues was closely related to the change of the political approach by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) towards Israel, and also due to the influx of dollars especially from international donor aid. As a matter of concern, after the signing of the Declaration of Principle (DoP) between the PLO and Israel in Washington on September 13, 1993, a Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was subsequently formed. PNA was held responsible to look after Palestinian affairs in the self-rule areas (West Bank and Gaza Strip), and to negotiate towards a final settlement with Israel. As a result of this signing, some forty donor states and organizations pledged to donate US\$2.4 billion over a five year period to PNA (Jensen, 2005). Unfortunately, when Hamas took over Gaza in 2007, the US and EU cut off all the humanitarian aid to the Palestinians.

Accordingly, a dilemma occurred between PNA and NGOs when both parties attempted to maintain their influence among the Palestinians (Pitner 2000). This is because PNA regarded itself as the main actor, and wanted to curb the influence of other NGOs. According to Brown (2003), among the main areas of contention between PNA and NGOs was largely related to the funding. The former preferred that all donors including international aid must be channelled through it first and not directly given to the latter. Another issue was the PNA's perception that NGOs were closely tied to the opposition. This perception, at some stage, might be true because many of the most successful NGOs were founded by political parties. The Union of Medical Relief Committees led by Dr. Mustafa Barghuti and In'ash al-Usra by Sameeha Khalil (1923-1999), for instance, often spoke out in opposition to PNA policies. The leaders of both NGOs even ran as candidates against the late Yasser Arafat in 1996 and Mahmoud Abbas in 2005 for the Presidency of the PNA, respectively. However frankly speaking, the NGO leaders were the only effective domestic monitor holding the PNA accountable for all their actions (Brown 2003, Hazan 2005).

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<sup>5</sup>Oslo Accords was the symbolic moment both for Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin when the two figures, in the presence of the former US President, Bill Clinton, agreed to sign a peace process, which was later called the Declaration of Principle (DoP), in 1993.

<sup>6</sup>The emphasis is not to argue that military approach is no longer relevant in confronting the Israelis, but the Islamists, particularly Hamas, believe that by creating a discourse of empowerment, and spreading Islamic values without violence through good example as a basis for growth and progress, especially for the Palestinians. Sara Roy, "The Transformation of Islamist NGOs in Palestine", Middle East Report, no. 214 (<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer214/transformation-islamist-ngos-palestine>).

Furthermore, the recent rapid rise of human rights NGOs was seen as a threat to the credibility of PNA in governing Palestinians affairs. PNA seldom questioned the easy access of these NGOs in receiving external funding, and this led to the view that the NGOs were working for the foreign powers (Brown 2003). Thus, as argued by Pitner (2000), most of the Middle Eastern governments including PNA, were trying to ‘frighten’ local NGOs away from accepting foreign money. In real terms, however, this was among the difficulties that NGOs faced in receiving external funding from international agencies, particularly from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the European Commission (EC). The International funders were conditioning their support on the adoption of specific projects. Pitner (2000) mentioned an example of the EC’s funding of Palestinian NGOs projects was the documentation of human rights violations committed by PNA. This was not different with USAID which also had its own political agenda as shown by Jensen (2005) in his interview session with several NGOs claiming that USAID floated the market with donated money. However, the beneficiaries had to sign an appendix to the agreement between the NGOs and local community with USAID, which stated that:

“As a condition of entering into the referenced agreement, [name of organisation] hereby certifies that it has not provided and will not provide material support or resources to any individual or entity that it knows, or has reason to know, is an individual or entity that advocates, plans, sponsors, engages in, or has engaged in terrorist activity....” (Jensen, 2005, 17).<sup>7</sup>

The USAID and other international donor’s conditions were to some extent realized by NGOs. Due to this, they stand firm that the community’s interests were far more important than the donor’s political agenda as had been strongly indicated by Ishaq Jad from Applied Research Institute in Jerusalem (ARIJ):

“This institute took a decision in the beginning that we don’t want to get too involved in the people to people. We also took a position that we don’t only work according to the needs of the donors. The top priority for us is to support the needs of our community, not worry what are the needs of the donor” (Jensen, 2005, 16).

NGOs ‘tug-of-war’ with PNA eventually reached its peak when seventy leading NGOs banded together to form the Palestine NGO Network or PNGO<sup>8</sup> (this was to exclude Islamists,

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<sup>7</sup> According to Jensen, the USAID has recently abandoned this policy due to pressure and massive opposition to this move. Michael Irving Jensen, “Peace, Aid & Renewed Anti-Colonial Resistance : The Development of Secular Palestinian NGOs in the Post-Oslo Period”, *DIIS Working Paper no 2005/7*, Danish Institute for International Studies, (<http://www.diss.dk>)

<sup>8</sup> According to Sullivan, PNGO which became effective on July 11, 1997, received initial funding from the World Bank, Saudi Arabia and Italy with the total project allocation estimated at US\$17 million. Dennis J. Sullivan, “The World Bank and the Palestinian NGO Project : Executive Summary”,

and those founded with the encouragement of the PNA). They became more frustrated with the way PNA managed the Palestinians affairs. PNA was not very effective and always became the victim when dealing with the Israelis. Therefore, the recent attempts of more humanitarian NGOs, including Malaysian NGOs, to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza could be considered as one of the continuous initiatives of all humanitarian NGOs to share the burden with the PNGO in dealing with all those challenges, and in particular, to end the sufferings of the Palestinians.

## **5. Malaysian NGOs' Contribution**

It is generally well-known that Malaysia, particularly Malaysian NGOs, is very supportive towards the Palestinians. Malaysia's undivided commitment in helping the Palestinians had begun in the era of the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, Malaysia's first Premier (1957-1970), until today. Malaysia's significant contributions to help the Palestinians range from the setting up of the PLO office in Kuala Lumpur in 1974 (which was later granted an 'Embassy' status in 1989) to always making the issue of Palestine as the main headlines in most of the United Nations Assembly, OICsummits, and other international human right conferences (OIC 1975, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1983, Camroux 1996, Nair 1997, Nor Azizan 2000, Anidah 2009, Hayati Ismail 2005, Asmady 2006).

In the case of the plight of the Gaza community, it is also not an exceptional case for Malaysia. Since the tragedy of the OCL, many international NGOs including Malaysians NGOs called strongly for the Israeli government to end the military onslaught in Gaza. For the Malaysian NGOs the plight of the Palestinians even before the OCL in Gaza, had become amongst the main agenda in their mission to uphold human rights issues at the international level. Hence, in discussing the involvement of the current Malaysian NGOs in Gaza, Aman Palestine Berhad and the Lifeline4Gaza will be given particular attention by this study.

## **6. Aman Palestine**

Aman Palestine is a non-profit organization and started operating in 2004. It was formally registered under the name of 'Aman Palestin Berhad (719871-K)' under the Companies Commission of Malaysia (SSM) on 3 January 2006. Its main office is situated in Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia. To date, Aman Palestine has 15 branches all over Malaysia including Sabah and Sarawak. This organization has three basic principles which are fundamental to the promotion of humanitarian values, to foster Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*), and to preserve the sanctity of the al-Aqsa Mosque (*Muqaddasat*). Its underlying objective however, is to create an awareness among Malaysians to the issues of Palestine. These efforts have been carried out through a multi-variety of activities both at domestic and international level (Aman Palestin Berhad 2011).

The programs organized by Aman Palestin included organizing expos and exhibitions such as ‘Jom Hebohkan Palestin’ (Let Us Share with Palestine) in Shah Alam, Selangor, ‘Malam Air Mata Palestin’ (The Night of Palestine’s Tears) in Gombak, Selangor, and others. On top of that, a few ‘ceramahs’ (or talks) on Palestine have been organized in several areas of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Aman Palestin speakers also appear regularly on Malaysian national television to share and to exchange opinions with local audiences. In addition Aman Palestin historically launched the ‘Tabung Palestin’ (Palestine Fund) on 8 September 2009, which was officiated by the King of Malaysia at Universiti Teknologi Mara, Selangor (Aman Palestin Berhad’s office). Further details of the humanitarian activities organized by Aman Palestin (and other co-organizers) at domestic level from 2006 till 2011 are indicated in Table 1:

**Table 1: Humanitarian Activities of Aman Palestin for the years 2006-2011\***

No	Program	Date	Venue
1.	Al-Quds Remembrance Day (Hari Sambutan Memperingati Al-Quds)	26 August 2006	Wilayah Persekutuan Mosque, Kuala Lumpur
2.	Tears Night for Palestine (Malam Amal Air Mata Palestin)	25 August 2006	Kompleks Muhibbah, Taman Industri Bolton, Batu Caves
3.	Palestine Night 06 (Malam Palestin 06)	18 November 2006	Dewan Serbaguna Kompleks Sukan TNB, Jalan Pantai Baru, KL
4.	Exhibitions and Charity Sale in Jom Heboh Carnival Shah Alam (Pameran & Jualan Amal Palestin di Karnival Jom Heboh Shah Alam)	9 -10 December 2006	Tapak Karnival Jom Heboh, Shah Alam
5.	Together with U Palestine (Bersamamu Palestin, (Ceramah, Forum, Pameran)	23-24 June 2007	Surau Al-Islah (Worldwide), Seksyen 7, S.Alam
6.	Awareness Day Program by Aman Palestin (Majlis Penerangan Aman Palestin)	27 May 2007	Dewan MBSA, Paya Jaras, Sg. Buloh
7.	Tea Program with the Martyr’s Family (Majlis Hi-Tea Bersama Keluarga Syuhada’ Palestin)	18 August 2007	Cattlea Banquet Hall, Wisma PKNS, Shah Alam

8.	Awareness Day Program by Aman Palestin (Program Penerangan Hari Aman Palestin)	3 May 2008	SMKA Sharifah Rodziah, Melaka
9.	Care Ceremony to Save al-Aqsa (Majlis Amal Selamatkan Al-Aqsa)	2 August 2008	Dewan Raja Muda Musa, Kompleks Belia & Kebudayaan Negeri Selangor
10.	Concert and Dinner for Al-Quds (Konsert & Majlis Makan Malam Kembara Al-Quds)	2 - 3 August 2008	Pusat Konvensyen Kolej Universiti Islam Selangor
11.	Solidarity Program to Save Gaza (Program Rapat Umum Selamatkan Gaza)	10 January 2009	Stadium Malawati, Shah Alam
12.	Save and Pray for Gaza Night (Malam Save Gaza & Solat Hajat Perdana)	7 February 2009	Stadium MPKJ, Sek 15, BBB
13.	Convention on the Fall of Zionist Agenda (Konvensyen Berakhirnya Agenda Zionis (KBAZ))	9 May 2009	Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur
14.	Night Arts Program with Palestine (Program Malam Kesenian Bersamamu Palestin)	1 August 2009	Pusat Dakwah Paroi, Negeri Sembilan
15.	SENAMROBIK GAZA	24 January 2010	Taman Tasik Cempaka, Bangi
16.	Convention on Save al-Quds from the Zionist Regime (Konvensyen Selamatkan Masjid Al-Aqsa Dari Ancaman Zionis [KOSMAZ])	13 May 2010	Intim, Ipoh, Perak
17.	Dinner for Gaza War's Victim Medicine Fund (Majlis Makan Malam Amal Tabung Perubatan Mangsa Perang Gaza)	23 May 2010	Dewan Perdana Felda, Jln Semarak
18.	Solidarity Gathering (Perhimpunan Solidariti)	4 June 2010	In front of the Turkish Embassy
19.	Al-Aqsa Concert ("Konsert Demimu Al-Aqsa")	17 July 2010	Stadium Tertutup Nilai
20.	Colouring Competition on Save Palestine (Pertandingan Mewarna 'Save Palestine')	31 July 2010	Ruang Legar PKNS Bangi

21.	Mutual Ceremony with Sponsors and Media in Conjunction with Al-Quds World Remembrance Day (Majlis Ramah Mesra Bersama Penaja & Media Sempena Sambutan Hari Al-Quds Sedunia)	21 August 2010	Bkt Kiara, Kuala Lumpur
22.	Humanitarian Carnival for Palestine (Karnival Kemanusiaan Rakyat Palestin)	28 January – 6 February 2011	Dataran Pulau, Mersing
23.	Launching Ceremony for Public Campaign to Protect Palestine (Majlis Pelancaran Public Campaign to Protect Palestine (PC2P))	5 February 2011	Restoran Saloma Bistro, KL
24.	Charity Run for Palestine (Larian Amal Buatmu Palestin)	20 February 2011	Bangi
25.	Launching Ceremony of the setting up a new branch in Damansara and a Fund for Palestine (Majlis Pelancaran Pejabat AP cawangan Damansara & Memperkenalkan Ikon Tabung Palestin)	2 April 2011	Pejabat Aman Palestin Damansara
26.	Orator Competition on Palestine (Pertandingan Pidato Palestin “Palestin Di Hatiku”)	10 April 2011	PKNS Bangi
27.	Palestine Carnival (Karnival Bersamamu Palestin)	23 April – 1 May 2011	Tapak Letak Kereta PKNS Bangi
28.	Convention on Save al-Quds from the Zionist Regime (Konvensyen Selamatkan Masjid Al-Aqsa Dari Ancaman Zionis (KOSMAZ))	12 May 2011	Auditorium INTIM, Perak
29.	Palestin Care Convoy (Konvoi Amal Palestin)	15 May 2011	TV9 – Aman Palestin Damansara
30.	Palestine We Care For You 2011	29 May 2011	Laman Budaya Shah Alam

\*Source :Aman Palestin Berhad Office, Selangor, 2011.

Internationally Aman Palestin located its humanitarian activities mainly in Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon. Not unlike the programs organized at home, Aman Palestin also organized programmes abroad which could ease the plight of Palestinians such as the ‘ziarah’ or the Islamic brotherhood visit to Lebanon in 2007. In Lebanon, Aman Palestin held a seminar on the future of the Palestinian children in Beirut, and made donations to the Palestinian orphanages. Aman Palestin also introduced a special project called ‘Kafalah’ to ease the plight of the 4,288 poor Palestinian families. The program encouraged every Malaysian to join and needed five sponsors to donate monthly RM170 (US\$56.66) each. From this the sum totalling RM850 (US\$283.33) looks after one poor family every month for at least a year. The total number of Palestinian poor families is shown in Table 2:

**Table 2: The Number of Poor Families Identified by the Kafalah Project\***

No.	Area	No. of Poor Families
1	Al-Quds	202
2	Gaza	1301
3	Nablus	539
4	Ramallah	363
5	Khalil	459
6	Khalil Village	354
7	Bait Lahm	301
8	Jenin	259
9	Tulkaram	158
10	Qilqilah	148
11	Lebanon	204
Total		4,288 families

\*Source: Fund and Finance Division, Aman Palestin Berhad.

Also under the Kafalah Project Aman Palestine gave financial support for the education and upkeep of orphans. To date, there are about 50 Palestinians who have received some financial assistance from this organization.<sup>9</sup> The generosity of Aman Palestin in lessening the burden of the Palestinians has long been acknowledged, especially by the Islamic Movement of Palestine, Hamas. For example, on 12 April 2005, Aman Palestin was invited, together with the Malaysian Muslim Association or ISMA, by Hamas to go to Syria where they had a golden opportunity to meet the Hamas Political Bureau chief, Khalid Meshaal, and the Syrian office staff of Hamas. This invitation was to express the gratitude of Hamas for the efforts and hard work carried out by the two Malaysian NGOs in helping the Palestinian people to ease their burdens.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Interview with Ustaz Mohd. Azrin bin Shamsuddin, Aman Palestin, Selangor, 27 June 2011. Meanwhile, the data on the total number of Palestinians receiving financial aid is kindly provided by Farhani Mohd. Ghani, Executive Officer, Aman Palestin, Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor.

<sup>10</sup>Aman Palestine, “Invitation of Appreciation”, (<http://amanpalestin.net/english/baca.php?lihat=beritaPenuh&action=fullness&showcomments=1&id=29>).

Aman Palestin also planned a number of socio-development projects to help the Gazans due to the Israeli blockade. Among the main projects were to include the building of new houses for the orphans; securing financial supports for education; supplying foods and medicines to the needy group of people, particularly during winter; and the setting up of a mini clinic and mini supermarket (this project was co-organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, and named as 'Baladna Supermarket) in Gaza. Other projects also included giving emergency aid to the people in al-Mughraqa, and developing an animal farm project in Jabalia, Gaza (another animal farm project was also built in Nablus, the West Bank). Besides that, several new projects have been launched which included giving donations (minimum of RM350 or US\$116.66) for animal sacrifice or Qurban during Eidul Adha festival. It was reported in 2010 that the animal sacrifice collection amounted to RM409,486 (US\$136.495) and was successfully distributed to 7,000 families in the Gaza Strip (Buletin Aman Palestin 2010). Consequently based on the contributions of the Malaysian people through the Gaza Mission I (2 May-8 July 2010) and Gaza Mission II (8 August-15 August 2010), Aman Palestin managed to procure and deliver some basic life necessities like food (mainly baby milk), medicine, and school products (such as clothes and bags) which amounted to RM926,727 (US\$308.909). Aman Palestin also planned to breakfast with the Palestinians in the al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadhan sometime in August 2011 (Buletin Aman Palestin, 2011).

In order to ensure the continuity of their humanitarian efforts in Gaza and other occupied Palestinian territories Aman Palestin also conducted road shows with the first one being in Egypt in 2009. This event was co-organized with the other two Malaysian NGOs, namely the Malaysian Muslim Association or ISMA, and the Malaysian Students Department of Egypt. This event successfully attracted more than 400 Malaysian students studying in Egypt. Among the main activities conducted was the introduction of a Training the Trainers course. About 60 participants registered for this course, which educated and trained them on the history of Palestine, Al-Quds, and other important events based on the al-Qur'an and Hadith. At the end of the roadshow, the director of this program, Salman bin Abdul Rahman, presented a cheque amounting to (Egyptian Pound) LE44,226.40<sup>11</sup> (US\$7468.49) to Aman Palestin Berhad as a token of their appreciation for the strong support on the issues of Palestine (Buletin Aman Palestin, 2010).

At the domestic level (as stated in Table 1), Aman Palestin rallied more Gazan humanitarian activities such as having a mass gathering (about 10,000 people) under the banner of 'Save Gaza' on 10 January 2009 in Stadium Melawati Shah Alam, Selangor. Moreover, it conveyed a national convention on Zionism in Dewan Merdeka Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur in 2009 which was attended by more than 3,000 people. Furthermore, as a result of the

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<sup>11</sup>Locally, the abbreviation LE or L.E., which stands for *livre égyptienne* ([French](#) for Egyptian pound) is frequently used. E£ and £E are rarely used.

recent flotilla attack by the Zionist regime, Aman Palestin also posed a mass solidarity rally in front of the Turkish Embassy in Kuala Lumpur on 2 June 2010 to show moral support for the government of Turkey, and its people. As had been reported the attack had killed nine Turkish humanitarian activists. In addition, to attract non-Muslims' awareness on the issue of Palestine, a campaign called the 'Public Campaign to Protect Palestine' (PC2P) was launched on 5 February 2011 in Kuala Lumpur. The campaign was not only attended by the high committee of Aman Palestin but by other dignitaries like the Most Reverend Tan Sri Datuk Murphy Pakiam (Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur), and the ambassador of Ecuador, Her Excellency Lourdes Puma Puma (*Buletin Aman Palestin* 2010, *Buletin Aman Palestin* 2011, Profile Public Campaign 2 Protect Palestine 2011). Generally speaking, Aman Palestin Berhad is one of the most proactive Malaysian humanitarian NGOs successfully easing the suffering of the Gazans, and the Palestinians as a whole. It is also stated that more than RM6 million in donations and contributions by the Malaysians had been safely delivered to Palestine. Within the first three months of 2011 alone, a total amount of RM339,325.76 (US\$113.108) had been allocated to the Gazans (*Buletin Aman Palestin*, 2011).

Probably the one main question on everyone's mind is how was Aman Palestin able to pull their efforts off? Despite the blockades imposed and the ruthlessness of the Israeli regime dealing with any humanitarian efforts, they managed to deliver the basic life necessities and develop a few socio-economic projects as well. The answer is largely associated with the ability of this organization to create good relations with a few local NGOs in Palestine, and subsequently able to set up a branch office in Gaza. This office was run by the Palestinians themselves, and is currently headed by its Chief Executive Officer, Ir. Omar J. Seyyam.

One significant point to be emphasized here is that Aman Palestin so far has not joined any international flotilla by sea route to deliver humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza but instead has been using the land route of the Rafah (Egypt)-Gaza crossing. Aman Palestin argued that the Rafah-Gaza crossing had helped them a great deal in bringing the basic goods, although limited, to the Palestinians. Although the flotilla brought wider impact upon the international community, but to some extent, it was much more difficult as this means defying the Israeli military, as was seen during the Israeli retaliation in the tragedy of Mavi Marmara. The land route which was made much easier for Aman Palestin, to conduct their humanitarian work, was largely due to the fact that their Executive Chairman, Abdullah Zaik Abdul Rahman, was also an Al-Azhar University Alumni and has first-rate relations with the Egyptian government.<sup>12</sup>

## 7. Lifeline4Gaza

Lifeline4Gaza (or in Malay means 'Talian Hayat Untuk Gaza') is a collaborative effort between Malaysian NGOs to join an international campaign to break years of Israel siege on Gaza. It is

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<sup>12</sup>Discussion with Awang Suffian Awang Piut (CEO Aman Palestine Berhad), via telephone, 27 June 2011, and interview with Ustaz Wan Mohammad Mior Ismail, Aman Palestin Berhad (branch in Sabah), Kota Kinabalu, 21 June 2011, and Mohd. Azmir Samadi, Sales Supervisor, Aman Palestin Berhad, Bangi, 3 May 2011.

working with Free Gaza Movement (based in Cyprus), IHH (Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief Foundation, Turkey), MER-C (Medical Emergency Rescue Committee, Indonesia), KISPA (Indonesian Committee for Palestine Solidarity), Sahabat Al-Aqsa, and other NGOs from The United States of America, Greece, France, Sweden, Germany, Italy, Venezuela, and many more.<sup>13</sup> Among the Malaysian NGOs that formed ‘Lifeline4Gaza – Break the Siege’ are the Coalition of Graduates of Higher Institutions of Malaysia (HALUAN), Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (ABIM), Jemaah Islah Malaysia (JIM), Palestinian Centre of Excellence (PACE), Aqsa Syarif, Dewan Pemuda Masjid Malaysia (Dewan Pemuda), Pertubuhan Mawaddah Malaysia, and Viva Palestina Malaysia (VPM), Muslim Care, Yayasan Amal Malaysia, MAPIM, and others.<sup>14</sup>

In helping the Gazans face the Israeli blockade, Lifeline4Gaza (different with Aman Palestin which used the land route, through the Rafah-Gaza crossing) joined the Free Gaza Flotilla I which was orchestrated by a coalition of six organizations, namely the Free Gaza Movement, IHH, the European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza (ECESG), the International Committee to End the Siege on Gaza, the Greek Ship to Gaza Campaign, and the Swedish Ship to Gaza. The flotilla was originally comprised of eight ships but only six managed to gather on 30 May 2010 in international waters far south of the island of Cyprus and west of Israel. The six ships were MV Mavi Marmara under the Komor flag (the Union of the Comoros islands located off the eastern coast of Africa), MV Challenger I under the US flag, MV Sfondoni under the Togo flag, the freighter MV Defney under the Kiribati flag (Republic of Kiribati, an island nation located in the central tropical Pacific Ocean), the MV Eleftheri Mesogeio (Free Mediterranean) under the Greek flag, and the MV Gazze I Sofia under the flag of Turkey. The other two ships, the US flagged MV Challenger II, and the freighter Rachel Corrie under the Cambodian flag, as a result of many problems, did not reach the meeting place in time. Due to damage of its steering, The MV Challenger II had to abandon its journey and transferred its passengers to the Mavi Marmara. Meanwhile, the freighter Rachel Corrie eventually reached Gaza after the Israelis raided the Mavi Marmara on 31 May 2010. Among the goods carried by the flotilla were approximately 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid in the form of food and textiles, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, building materials such as 3,500 tons of cement, 750 tons of steel, wood, plastic window frames and glass, electric and diesel generators, toys, and 20 tons of paper, and other goods. (Paech, 2010).

In the case of Lifeline4Gaza 12 Malaysian members were on board the Mavi Marmara. They were Tuan Hj. Noorazman bin Mohd. Samsudin (HALUAN Palestin, and the chairperson of this group), Dr. Mohd. Arbai’e bin Syawal (HALUAN Palestin), Dr Syed Muhammad Haleem bin Syed Hasan al-Haddad (HALUAN Palestin), Ustaz Al-Hami Husain bin Suhaimi (HALUAN Palestin), Mohd. Nizam bin Mohd. Awang (HALUAN Palestin), Ustaz Hasanuddin bin Mohd.

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<sup>13</sup>Lifeline4gaza, “About Us”, (<http://www.lifeline4gaza.org>).

<sup>14</sup> Lifeline4gaza, “Malaysian NGOs and Representative of IHH Launch Lifeline 4 Gaza”, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010, (<http://www.lifeline4gaza.org/2010/04/13/malaysian-ngos-and-representative-of-ihh-launch-lifeline-4-gaza-project/>).

Yunus (Aqsa Syarif), Tuan Hj. Jamuliddin bin Elias (Yayasan Amal Malaysia, AMAL MALAYSIA), Dr Selamat bin Aliman (Jemaah Islah Malaysia, JIM), Abdul Halim bin Mohd. Redzuan (Muslim Care), Mustafa bin Mansur (MAPIM), Ashwad bin Ismail (ASTRO journalist), and Shamsul Kamal Latif (ASTRO cameraman).

Despite the raid on the Mavi Marmara which killed nine Turkish activists and injured 50 others including one victim who was severely wounded and is still being treated in the hospital, all the 12 Malaysians were arrested then later released by the Israeli regime on 2 June 2010 and safely transferred to Jordan. However, they were initially imprisoned in Be'er Sheva, Israel, and most of their belongings and media equipment were confiscated and not returned. According to Ashwad Ismail (a Journalist from ASTRO who joined the flotilla 1), Be'er Sheva is a new prison, so they were among the first prisoners of this prison (Fatimah & Farhan, 2010).<sup>15</sup>

The recent involvement of the Lifeline4Gaza in the Free Gaza Flotilla I had shown again to the world the continuous commitment of Malaysian NGOs to ease the suffering of the Gaza community. At a certain point, one might simply say that the Islamic factor may be the overarching reason that led these organizations to firmly support the Gazans. Nevertheless, according to Ustaz Hasanuddin bin Mohd. Yunus<sup>16</sup> (Aqsa Syarif), and Dr Syed Muhammad Haleem bin Syed Hasan al-Haddad<sup>17</sup> (HALUAN Palestin) who were among the 12 Malaysian activists on the Mavi Marmara, the flotilla had successfully managed to achieve at least three main objectives. These were to make an effort to deliver economic aid (despite the fact the mission failed); to pressure the Israeli regime to end the blockade; and more importantly to change the old worldview that constantly see the question of Palestine as purely an Islamic matter.

The suffering and the discrimination of the Gazans at the hands of the Zionist regime falls within the context of human rights abuse. People around the globe have witnessed the crime committed by the Israeli government against the weaker Palestinians. The international flotilla launched by the Free Gaza Movement, IHH and others, to some extent proved to the world that all humanitarian activists irrespective of their race or religion<sup>18</sup> were all united in confronting the

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Dr Syed Muhammad Haleem bin Syed Hasan al-Haddad (HALUAN Palestin) as one of the 12 Malaysian members boarded the Mavi Marmara Ship, Shah Alam, Selangor, 28 June, 2011, Lifeline4gaza "12 Rakyat Malaysia di atas Kapal Mavi Marmara", May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010, (<http://www.lifeline4gaza.org/2010/05/31/12-rakyat-malaysia-di-atas-kapal-mavi-marmara/>). Lifeline4gaza "12 Rakyat Malaysia Bebas", June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, (<http://www.lifeline4gaza.org/2010/06/02/terkini-12-rakyat-malaysia-bebas/>).

<sup>16</sup> Ustaz Hasanuddin bin Mohd. Yunus from Aqsa Syarif delivered his ceramah (religious talk) in which the author attended on Palestine, especially the plight of the Gazan community due to the Israeli blockade, at the mosque of Universiti Malaysia Sabah in 31 March 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Dr Syed Muhammad Haleem bin Syed Hasan al-Haddad (HALUAN Palestin) as one of the 12 Malaysian members on the Mavi Marmara Ship, Shah Alam, Selangor, 28 June, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> According to Ustaz Hasanuddin bin Mohd. Yunus, the Mavi Marmara ship even brought a Roman Catholic priest (aged about 80 years old); who was showing great enthusiasm in helping the Gazan community. Ustaz Hasanuddin bin Mohd. Yunus (Aqsa Syarif), "Memahami Isu Palestin", *ceramah*(religious talk), Universiti Malaysia Sabah Mosque, March 2011.

Israeli government to end the siege and to give full freedom for the Palestinians to establish their own independent state.

Ironically for the turn of events, despite having failed to deliver the humanitarian aid to Gaza, it was actually an achievement for the organizers of the flotilla. The world community especially the European leaders had become more aware on the plight of the Palestinians. More and more European leaders have since paid a series of humanitarian visits to Gaza to render their support. These visits have been from people such as Catherine Ashton (the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs) and Chris Patten the former EU Commissioner, both in July 2010<sup>19</sup>. Guido Westerwelle, the German Foreign Minister, and Franco Frattini, the Italian Foreign Minister also paid individual visits in November 2010.<sup>20</sup> Alexander Stubb the Foreign Minister of Finland visited Gaza in October 2010,<sup>21</sup> and again the German Foreign Minister, Westerwelle but this time with his counterpart, Dirk Niebel (German Development Minister) visited Gaza in June 2011. In the meantime, the British Foreign Secretary, William Hague was shown EU projects in the Gaza Strip during his visit to Israel in November 2010.<sup>22</sup> For the Turkish government, its Prime Minister Recip Tayyip Endorgan had pressured the international community to bring the Zionist regime to justice. The US government meanwhile had to face mass demonstration from its own people at home condemning the Israeli attack against the flotilla. But more importantly, the flotilla too has resulted in the opening of the Rafah crossing more often than before. (Fatimah & Farhan, 2010). In other words, the issues of the Gaza community and the Israeli blockade have become more significant nowadays.

For the Malaysian NGOs, Lifeline4Gaza will continue as the platform for carrying out more humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. Various programs have been arranged since the Free Gaza Flotilla I, despite the Israeli attack. For instance, about four months after the Free Gaza Flotilla I, two other branches of the Lifeline4Gaza NGO, the Malaysian Viva Palestina (five members), and Aqsa Syarif (seven members), joined another international humanitarian aid trip to Gaza known as the 'Lifeline5 Mission'. This mission was led by Viva Palestina, and attempted

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<sup>19</sup>*BBC News*, "EU Envoy Urges Israel to Open Gaza Borders", 18 July 2010, (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-10675713>), *BBC News*, "Chris Patten Visits Gaza", 19 July 2010, (<http://www.middleeastmonitor.org.uk/news/middle-east/1324-chris-pattern-visits-gaza>). Chris Patten is also the former Chancellor of University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK where the author was also pursuing his Ph.D in this university.

<sup>20</sup> Herb Keinon, "Italian FM to be allowed to visit Gaza Strip", *The Jerusalem Post*, 23 November 2010, (<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=196399>), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/11/08/guido-westerwelle-german-\\_n\\_780589.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/11/08/guido-westerwelle-german-_n_780589.html), Guido Westerwelle, German Foreign Minister, Visits Gaza, Says Blockade 'Unacceptable', *Huffpost World*, 8 November 2010

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/11/08/guido-westerwelle-german-\\_n\\_780589.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/11/08/guido-westerwelle-german-_n_780589.html)

<sup>21</sup>*Christian Blind Mission* (CBM), "Finnish Foreign Minister visits CBM programme", 14 October 2010, ([http://www.cbm.org/Finnish\\_Foreign\\_Minister\\_visits\\_CBM\\_programme-272202.php](http://www.cbm.org/Finnish_Foreign_Minister_visits_CBM_programme-272202.php)).

<sup>22</sup>Herb Keinon, *op.cit.*

to enter Gaza through Rafah, Egypt. The Lifeline 5 Mission involved 150 transports, and was joined by 370 humanitarian activists from 30 countries. After travelling for more than 3,000 miles from London, which took about one month, they finally entered Gaza on 21 October 2010. They brought with them food, medicine, and other basic goods estimated to be around US\$5 million dollars.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Aqsa Syarif (as one of the Lifeline4Gaza groups) since the flotilla has initiated several socio-economic projects to be implemented in Gaza. Among the projects are as the following:<sup>24</sup>

- a) Bread Factory Project – situated in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza and run by the Islamic Society Beit Lahiya
- b) Financial Assistance for the Poor Family and Palestinian Orphans – the focus groups are both in Gaza and the West Bank. A poor family will be divided into several units (between 50 to 80 units) to be financially sponsored. The lowest is RM35 (US\$11.66) monthly per unit for at least a year. For an orphan, the lowest cost is RM170 (US\$56.66) monthly, again for at least a year.
- c) School Bag Project – about 5,000 students are expected to take part. The cost is US\$35 dollar for a student.
- d) Cancer Kids Patient Project in the Rantisi Hospital – the cost approximately RM250,000 (US\$83,333) per year. This project will be monitored by the Institute of Khatwa Youth in Gaza city.
- e) Small Entrepreneurship Project – this project was established to help several poor families to run their own small business. The cost was estimated at Euro300,000 (RM1.2 million ringgit), and will be managed by Al-Najdah Social Association Gaza, and Emaar Association in Khan Younis, southern Gaza.
- f) Farm Animal Project – this project was co-organized with Aman Palestin Berhad<sup>25</sup> and involved the setting up of farms which include cows, sheep, chickens and rabbits. The location will be in Jabalia, and the total cost of this project may reach about RM300,000 (US\$100,000 dollar).
- g) Fish Water Project and Fish Manufacturing Factory – the cost of this project is estimated at RM300,000 (US\$100,000 dollar). The first phase of this project has already started, and was supervised by the Islamic Society of Gaza.

At the domestic level, the members of the Lifeline4Gaza have toured all over Malaysia in order to share and to exchange their experiences and ordeals of especially having to face the

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<sup>23</sup> Lifeline4gaza “Lifeline 5 Berjaya Memasuki Gaza!”, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, (<http://www.lifeline4gaza.org/2010/10/22/lifeline-5-berjaya-memasuki-gaza/>).

<sup>24</sup> Aqsa Syarif, “Misi & Projek”, (<http://www.aqsasyarif.org.my/projek/>).

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Muhamad Munawer Ismail, General Manager, Aqsa Syarif Office, Kajang, Selangor, 28 June 2011.

Israeli raid against them on the Mavi Marmara ship.<sup>26</sup> A lot of programmes have been arranged, and they varied from having dialogues and discussions on local television to giving public talks in several public and private institutions. The support they received so far from the Malaysian public has been tremendous. Although, it could be said that the amount of help is still less compared to other international NGOs' contributions, but this will inspire members of the Lifeline4Gaza to organize more humanitarian activities in continuously supporting Palestine. It is known that the second flotilla has been launched, and has begun its long journey to Gaza. Unfortunately, this mission also failed due to the policy of the government of Greece which prevented vessels from leaving its port heading to the blockaded Gaza strip.<sup>27</sup> Despite the failure, this second flotilla has certainly made the issue of Gaza more prominent to the international community.

## **8. The Malaysian Government's Stance on Humanitarian Aid in Gaza**

As had been indicated before, the Malaysian government has been at the forefront of championing the Palestinian issues, particularly on the issue of Gaza. In fact, the government has proclaimed its full commitment and support for all Malaysian NGOs pursuing the Palestinian cause. In regards to the efforts made by Aman Palestin and Lifeline4Gaza, the government has shown its undivided support and will always provide any help requested by these two NGOs. In fact, not only Aman Palestin and Lifeline4Gaza, were given huge support by the government, but this support has continued for other NGOs condemning the Israeli blockade against the Gazans.

Principally, along with Aman Palestin and Lifeline4Gaza groups, there were several other NGOs that were actively involved in helping the Palestinians. Among them were Perdana Global Peace Foundation (PGPO) led by the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, and MERCY Malaysia. One of the main objectives of PGPO was to oppose war and champion peace and global understanding and they have tried twice to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza. Unfortunately both attempts were stopped by the Israeli government.<sup>28</sup> In the case of MERCY Malaysia, they have sent doctors, donated medical equipment and ambulances, and also helped to reconstruct the El-Wafa Medical Rehabilitation and Specialized Surgery Hospital in Gaza.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> A book written by Fatimah & Farhan (2010) could help readers to share the ordeals of all the Malaysian activists on the Mavi Marmara ship.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Shingler, "Canadian boat stopped in Greece as flotilla banned from heading to Gaza" *The Canadian Press*, 2011/07/01, (<http://www.citytv.com/toronto/citynews/news/international/article/140368--canadian-boat-stopped-in-greece-as-flotilla-banned-from-heading-to-gaza>).

<sup>28</sup> PGPO, "PGPO Plans Multi-pronged Gaza Aid Delivery, Says Mukhriz", June 17, 2010, (<http://www.perdana4peace.net/?p=1747>).

<sup>29</sup> "Mercy Malaysia Denies Rumours of Death of its Doctors in Gaza", *The Malay Mail*, June 9th, 2010, (<http://www.mmail.com.my/content/39155-mercy-malaysia-denies-rumours-death-its-doctors-gaza>).

The Malaysian government through its non-governmental organization, 'Putera 1 Malaysia Club' (Kelab Putera 1Malaysia) led by Dato Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim (one of the UMNO<sup>30</sup> supreme councillors) had organized a "Humanitarian Mission to Gaza". This mission who was in collaboration with the Malaysian Red Crescent Society, Wisma Putra, The Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, The Palestinian Ambassador, and the Palestine Red Crescent Society, consisted of 67 volunteers including 35 doctors. They successfully went to Gaza in the second week of August 2010. The club managed to deliver Ramadan humanitarian aid from Malaysians such as foodstuff, clothing, blankets and medicines to more than 2,000 families in several settlements in the besieged region. Meanwhile, the President of the club was given the honour of meeting the senior Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Gaza city on 12 August 2010.<sup>31</sup> In other words, it could be said that the dilemma of the phrase 'state actor versus non state actor' in promoting humanitarian causes had found less relevance within the context of the Malaysian government and its relations with NGOs. This is because both the Malaysian government (state actor), and local NGOs (non-state actor) mutually work hand in hand to ease the burden of the Palestinians. Consequently these efforts will also foster closer diplomatic relations between the governments of Malaysia and Palestine. The Palestinians appreciated what has been done by the Malaysian NGOs in easing the suffering of the Gazans. But their real struggle, to achieve an independent state, needs unending support from not only the Malaysian government and people, but from the whole world.<sup>32</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

Undeniably the long suffering of the Gazan community under the cruelty of the Israeli blockade has brought global attention to the Palestinians' plight and ultimately succeeded in bringing the world much closer. Many international and Malaysian NGOs have come forward to render help and minimize the plight of the Palestinians. Many humanitarian activities have been planned to lighten the burden of the Palestinians. Despite the harsh and cruel treatments by the Israelis towards these efforts, the NGOs are still being successful (in some respect) in distributing basic goods to the people of Gaza.

To some extent, the rise of many NGOs in championing the issue of human rights at the international level has been considered as a challenge for the state, particularly the influential states. In other words, the continuous reaction of NGOs challenging the state on the issue of human rights has indirectly furthered the rivalry in the discipline of international relations, namely 'state actor versus non-state actors (in this case, NGOs)'. Without relying on the

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<sup>30</sup> United Malay National Organization (UMNO) is the dominant party in Barisan Nasional, and has ruled Malaysia since its independence in 1957 until today.

<sup>31</sup> Syed Azwan Syed Ali, "Putera 1 Malaysia Club Meets Senior Hamas Leader", Bernama, Malaysian National News Agency, (<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/news1Malaysia.php?id=520723>), KelabPutera1Malaysia, "Humanitarian Mission", (<http://www.kelabputera1malaysia.com/putera-gaza-peace-mission>).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mr. Sofian Alkhalidi, First Counsellor, Embassy of the State of Palestine, Kuala Lumpur, 29 June 2011.

influence of the powerful states, many international NGOs have successfully managed to show to the world that they can do things that states ‘can’t do’. By using more diplomatic ways (delivering humanitarian aid), and not in the form of terrorism, this has been found to be more effective to enlighten the world leaders to the sufferings of the Gaza people.

For the Malaysian NGOs, particularly Aman Palestin and Lifeline4Gaza, easing the burden of the Palestinians is a responsibility that should be shared. Besides, this has been the policy of the Malaysian government since the day of independence of 1957. In the case of this study, it has found that although these two groups applied different approaches, with Aman Palestin using the land route of the Rafah crossing and the Lifeline4Gaza joining the international flotillas, the same goals are being pursued: to help the people of Palestine to be safe and free. However, it must be indicated that the land route of the Rafah has been found to be more successful in delivering humanitarian goods to the community of Gaza than the international flotillas. This is largely due to the close co-operation between the Malaysian NGOs, the Egypt government and the Palestinian representatives in Gaza, Palestine to ensure the delivery process is completed accordingly. Furthermore, it also can be argued that both the state (Malaysian government) and non-state actors (Malaysian NGOs) are co-operating well in promoting the issue of human rights internationally. Both are supporting each other to ensure the mission and the vision of helping the Palestinians becomes a reality. This indirectly shows that if there is continuous dialogue and communication being held by both state and non-state actors, more efforts of humanitarian aid can be projected in the years ahead.

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