

The Hijacking of the Handala: Piracy in the Service of Genocide Amid Deliberate Famine in Gaza

On the night of **July 26, 2025**, Israeli naval forces hijacked the *Handala*, a Norwegian-flagged civilian vessel carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza. Operated by the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, the *Handala* was **40 nautical miles off the coast of Gaza - in international waters** - when it was intercepted by Israeli warships. On board were **21 civilians** from over a dozen countries: members of parliament, doctors, lawyers, journalists, engineers, and human rights activists. Their mission was simple: bring desperately needed food and medicine to Gaza's starving children.

Instead, they were violently abducted by one of the most heavily armed militaries on Earth.

The *Handala* is not just another victim of Israeli aggression. It is a symbol of how far this siege has gone - and how far the world has failed to act.

Gaza's Deliberate Famine

Since **March 3, 2025**, Israel has imposed a **total siege** on Gaza. No food. No fuel. No water. No medicine. The result is now recognized globally as a **stage 5 famine** - the most catastrophic classification on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) scale.

Children are dying of starvation every day. Entire families are wasting away. Survivors are suffering irreversible damage: infants with stunted brains, adults with failing organs. This is not collateral damage. This is policy.

The use of starvation as a weapon of war is **a war crime**. When inflicted with the intent to destroy a population in whole or in part, it becomes **genocide** - as defined under Article II(c) of the **Genocide Convention**:

“Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.”

The Handala: A Civilian Mission Attacked

The *Handala* was a 20-meter trawler sailing under the **Norwegian flag**, carrying humanitarian cargo: **baby formula, food, diapers, and medical supplies**. The 21 passengers included:

- **Christian Smalls** (USA) – Labor organizer and founder of the Amazon Labor Union

- **Huwaida Arraf** (USA) – Human rights lawyer and Palestinian-American activist
- **Emma Fourreau & Gabrielle Cathala** (France) – Sitting members of the French Parliament
- **Chloe Ludden** (UK) – Former United Nations scientist who resigned to join the mission
- **Antonio La Picirella** (Italy) – Grassroots social justice organizer

The ship posed no threat to Israel. It was unarmed. It was open about its route and intentions. Its destination was not Israel, but **Gaza**.

Yet Israel attacked it. **Live communications were cut at 23:43 EEST**. The ship was boarded by force, the passengers detained, and the aid confiscated.

Piracy Under International Law

The *Handala* was seized in **international waters**, far outside the territorial jurisdiction of any state. Under **Article 101 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, this qualifies as **piracy**:

“Any illegal acts of violence or detention... on the high seas against another ship.”

Israel had **no legal right** to board or divert the ship. The *Handala* was a foreign-flagged civilian vessel. Its seizure by military force, without legal process, was **state piracy**.

This was not border enforcement. This was the criminalization of humanitarian aid.

Israel Has No Legal Claim Over Gaza's Waters

Israel claims its blockade is legal. But under **international maritime law**, it isn't.

- Under **UNCLOS Article 2**, only a **sovereign coastal state** can control its territorial sea
- **Israel does not claim Gaza** as part of its territory
- Therefore, it has **no legal authority** over Gaza's territorial waters - let alone the high seas beyond

In 2024, the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** issued an advisory opinion reaffirming that **Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory is unlawful**. Its naval blockade - which blocks food and medical aid from reaching civilians - is not a legitimate security measure. It is **a form of collective punishment**, prohibited by international humanitarian law.

Military intervention to break the blockade is **not aggression against Israel**, because Israel **has no lawful territorial claim** over Gaza's waters. Intervening to deliver humanitarian aid would **restore Palestinian sovereignty**, not violate Israeli sovereignty.

Israel's Duty to Provide Aid - And Its Deliberate Violation

As the occupying power in Gaza, Israel is bound by:

- **The Fourth Geneva Convention**, Article 55: Requires occupying powers to ensure access to food and medicine
- **Customary international humanitarian law**: Forbids starvation as a weapon
- **The Responsibility to Protect (R2P)** doctrine: Demands international action when a state fails to protect its population from mass atrocities, including genocide

Israel is not failing to meet these duties - it is **deliberately violating them**. And it is punishing others for trying to help.

In **January and March 2024**, the **ICJ issued binding provisional measures**, ordering Israel to:

“Enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.”

The seizure of the *Handala* is a **direct violation** of those orders.

What Happened to the Crew?

Unlike the earlier **Madleen** mission - where 12 crew members were forced to sign documents claiming they had “entered Israel illegally” before being deported - the **21 crew members of the *Handala* are still detained** as of this writing.

No criminal charges have been filed.

Yet Israel is reportedly attempting the same farce: coercing the *Handala* crew to sign documents stating they “entered Israel illegally,” despite being **abducted in international waters**. Their destination was Gaza, not Israel. Signing those papers is not legal process - it is a fabrication designed to erase the crime of abduction and create a paper trail of false legality.

The Legal and Moral Duty to Act

Under the **Genocide Convention**, the **ICJ Statute**, and **R2P**, all signatory states have a binding obligation to:

- **Prevent genocide**
- **Uphold ICJ rulings**
- **Protect civilians and humanitarian missions**

That duty **includes the use of force, if necessary**, to stop mass starvation and unblock access to aid. When peaceful aid missions like the *Handala* are attacked, other states are no longer merely permitted to intervene - they are **required** to.

Where was Norway's navy?

Where were the EU's ships?

Where were the signatories of the Genocide Convention?

To remain silent is to become complicit.

Conclusion: Let Gaza Live

The hijacking of the *Handala* is a line in the water. It is not only Gaza that is being strangled. It is the principle that people should not be starved for being born in the wrong place. It is the principle that aid is not a crime. It is the belief that law matters more than brute force.

Israel's actions are **piracy**, **terrorism**, and **genocide** - not because activists say so, but because the law says so.

The world must act now:

- **Release the *Handala* crew immediately**
- **End the blockade**
- **Escort future aid missions with naval protection if needed**
- **Hold Israel accountable in international courts**

Gaza's children are dying of hunger. The law is on their side. Humanity must be, too.