

20 July 2018

Dear Friends and Family,

I am due to join the al-Awda (The Return) Freedom Flotilla to Gaza this weekend on its last leg from Europe to Gaza. She has started her journey from Norway on the 70 Anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba and this journey is highly symbolic. The Nakba is the Arabic word for Catastrophe which started in 1948 when 50% of the population of Palestine was driven out to live in refugee camps and Palestine was erased from the map of the world. Please look at the links about the Awda and the other Freedom Flotilla she is joining.

<https://sgf.freedomflotilla.org/news/al-awda-freedom-flotilla>

<https://jfp.freedomflotilla.org/>

I am highly honoured to be invited on board. It is important to explain to you why I chose to do this. Among the queries I received is why I have overstepped my role as a doctor to do this. Can I not spend my vacation leave from the NHS on a holiday cruise instead of an old overcrowded fishing boat? My answer is simple. The situation in Gaza is dire. <https://www.bmj.com/content/349/bmj.g6644/rr>
<https://www.bmj.com/content/349/bmj.g6644/rr-0> both published in the British Medical Journal. A doctor, a surgeon is a human being with a conscience and a compassionate heart, much more than just a skilled technician. The very fact that I can do operations and fix broken bones will not stop me from losing my humanity. A robot might turn the other way, but a child of God does not.

Most of you know that I am going to be seventy come the end of the year and I would like to make this my birthday present to the people of Gaza and Palestine. Please read my statement below which will soon be included in the Freedom Flotilla website. You will know from what I wrote that even if Awda is kidnapped and all of us are put in prison, it is not a failed mission. The Palestinians will know that we have not forgotten them, and that we, like them, live out our lives with hope and love with faithfulness.

Statement:

"When invited to come on board Al-Awda, the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza, I know I must join them. This summer marks the thirty-sixth year of my journey with the Palestinians. It began in 1982 when as an ignorant Pro-Israel Christian doctor I first stepped foot as a volunteer surgeon in Gaza Hospital in Beirut's Sabra Shatilla Palestinian refugee camp. There I fell in love passionately with a generous, kind, honest and gentle people – the Palestinians. They were forced out of Palestine in 1948, and found themselves refugees. Despite the dispossession, persecution and injustice they remained human. About 3 weeks after my arrival, more than three thousand of them were cruelly massacred. My heart was broken and trampled on, and would have remained dead and buried in the rubble of their bulldozed homes. But the survivors even while burying their own loved ones nurtured me back to life with their tears and love. The children filled with courage, hope and dignity inspired me and gave me strength to walk on with them. "We are not afraid Doctora come with us". It is now 70 years since the Palestinian Nakba and Diaspora in 1948. When will their journey home begin? Today, six million Palestinians dispersed in various refugee camps are denied the right of return to their ancestral Palestine; the other six million lived under occupation in Gaza and West Bank. For twelve years, two million Palestinians have been imprisoned under a brutal land and sea military blockade in Gaza. During this time there were three major military assaults where Gaza was relentlessly bombed for weeks. Recently, since 30 March 2018, unarmed Gaza demonstrators calling for the Right of Return are shot at with high grade military assault rifles leaving more than 124 dead and 13,000 severely wounded with

hundreds of amputees and potential amputees. The Flotilla brings hope to the besieged Palestinians. They are praying for us in their mosques and churches in the Gaza Strip. They know we are making this journey for them. Even if we are to be abducted, imprisoned and deported, may we remain faithful in solidarity and love for the people of Palestine and Gaza.

Dr Swee Ang, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon; author *From Beirut to Jerusalem*.
July 2018"

Please remember Palestine and the people of Gaza, and all on board the Freedom Flotilla Coalition.

Love you all and God bless
Swee