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Israeli court stops deportation of two Australian flotilla participants held by Israel while a third returns home after arrest in Greece

Providing a Voice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release No 30 – 13 July 2011

Israeli court stops deportation of two Australian Flotilla participants held by Israel while a third Australian arrested in Greece returns to Sydney.

Israel detained human rights Sydney campaigners VIVIENNE PORZSOLT (70) from Jews Against the Occupation and SYLVIA HALE (69) former member of NSW State Parliament and Marrickville Council. Both had been in Greece as part of Freedom Flotilla II, trying to break the illegal siege of Gaza and to deliver badly needed humanitarian assistance.

The two Australians were detained at Tel Aviv airport for simply stating that they intended to visit Palestine. Approximately 700 international visitors had hoped to visit Bethlehem as part of the "Welcome to Palestine" initiative. More than 120 visitors, like Vivienne and Sylvia, have been detained by Israel in the last few days for declaring their intention of visiting the Palestinian territories.

The "Welcome to Palestine" initiative highlights Israel's discriminatory treatment of Palestinians, in particular the denial of their right to receive international visitors.

The Australian consulate in Tel Aviv said Israel had intended to deport the Australians at 7.00 am local time, on Wednesday, July 13 (approximately 2pm AEST). However an Israeli District Court has made an order not to deport the two women until after they have had the chance to appeal against the deportation order.

Both Sylvia Hale and Vivienne Porzsolt have visited Palestine (West Bank and Gaza) and Israel in the past.

MICHAEL COLEMAN, another Australian participant on Freedom Flotilla II was arrested and charged in Greece for attempting to sail to Gaza. He received a token suspended sentence and arrived back in Sydney yesterday and is available for interviews.

Mr Coleman said: "Sylvia and Vivienne's detention for trying visit Palestine by air, like my arrest in Greece for trying to sail to Gaza, shows that Palestine is an imprisoned nation that is at times denied even visitation rights from the outside world."

"I call on the Australian government to publicly reassure Australians that it supports the right of Australians to visit Palestine. I call on the Australian government to give assurances that it will make representations to the Israeli government about the rights of Australians to visit friends and family in Palestine." Mr. Coleman said.

"We all had our freedom of movement restricted because we tried to visit Palestine. People in Palestine have their freedom of movement restricted every day simply because they are Palestinians"

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