



Activists of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, board the Madleen boat, ahead of setting sail for Gaza, departing from the Sicilian port of Catania, Italy, Sunday, June 1, 2025. (AP/Salvatore Cavalli)

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A Gaza-bound aid boat carrying [Greta Thunberg](#) and other activists arrived at an Israeli port Monday after Israeli forces stopped and detained them — enforcing a longstanding blockade of the Palestinian territory that has been tightened during [the Israel-Hamas war](#).

The boat, accompanied by Israel's navy, arrived in Ashdod in the evening, according to Israel's Foreign Ministry. It published a photo on social media of Thunberg after disembarking.

The 12 activists were undergoing medical checks to ensure they are in good health, the ministry said. They were expected to be held at a detention facility in Ramle before being deported, according to Adalah, a legal rights group representing them.

The activists had set out to protest Israel's military campaign in Gaza, which is among the deadliest [and most destructive](#) since World War II, and [its restrictions](#) on the entry of humanitarian aid. Both have put the territory of around 2 million Palestinians [at risk of famine](#).

The Freedom Flotilla Coalition, which organized the voyage, said the activists were "kidnapped by Israeli forces " while trying to deliver desperately needed aid.

"The ship was unlawfully boarded, its unarmed civilian crew abducted and its life-saving cargo — including baby formula, food and medical supplies — confiscated," it said in a statement.

It said the ship was seized in international waters about 200 kilometers (120 miles) from Gaza, and Adalah asserted that Israel had "no legal authority" to take it over.

Israel's Foreign Ministry portrayed the voyage as a public relations stunt, saying on social media that "the 'selfie yacht' of the 'celebrities' is safely making its way to the shores of Israel."

It said the activists would return to their home countries and the aid would be sent to Gaza through established channels. It circulated footage of what appeared to be Israeli military personnel handing out sandwiches and water to the activists, who were wearing life vests.

Israel says boat was carrying minimal aid

Israeli officials said the flotilla carried what amounted to less than a truckload of aid.

"This wasn't humanitarian aid. It's Instagram activism," Israeli government spokesperson David Mencer said. "Meanwhile, Israel has delivered over 1,200 truckloads in the last two weeks. So who's really feeding Gaza and who's really feeding their own ego? Greta was not bringing aid, she was bringing herself."

After its 2½-month total blockade aimed at pressuring Hamas, Israel started allowing some basic aid into Gaza last month, but humanitarian workers and experts have [warned of famine](#) unless the blockade is lifted and Israel ends its military offensive. About 600 trucks of aid entered daily during the ceasefire that Israel ended in March.

An attempt last month by Freedom Flotilla to reach Gaza by sea failed after [two drones](#) attacked the vessel in international waters off Malta, organizers said. The group blamed Israel for [the attack](#), which damaged the ship's front section.

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Rights group questions Israel's seizure

The Madleen set sail from Sicily a week ago. Along the way, it stopped on Thursday [to rescue four migrants](#) who had jumped overboard to avoid being detained by Libya's coast guard.

"I urge all my friends, family and comrades to put pressure on the Swedish government to release me and the others as soon as possible," Thunberg said in a prerecorded message released after the ship was halted.

Adalah, the rights group, said in a statement that "the arrest of the unarmed activists, who operated in a civilian manner to provide humanitarian aid, amounts to

a serious breach of international law."

Rima Hassan, a French member of the European Parliament who is of Palestinian descent, was among those on board. She has been [barred from entering Israel](#) because of her opposition to Israeli policies toward the Palestinians.

She was among six French citizens on board. French President Emmanuel Macron called for consular protection and the repatriation of the French citizens.

"Most of all, France calls for a ceasefire as quickly as possible and the lifting of the humanitarian blockade. This is a scandal, unacceptable, that is playing out in Gaza. What's been happening since early March is a disgrace, a disgrace," Macron said

Next week, Macron co-hosts a conference at the U.N. on a two-state solution and recently said France should move toward recognizing a Palestinian state.

Swedish Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard said the crew and passengers were aware of the risks, Swedish news agency TT reported. Stenergard said the ministry's assessment is that no one was in danger and there was no need for consular support.

Trump says activist Greta Thunberg should take anger management classes

Asked about Thunberg at the White House, President Donald Trump said, "I think she has to go to anger management class. That's my primary recommendation for her."

Trump described the climate activist as a "young, angry person," but added, "I don't know if it's real anger."

An 18-year blockade on Gaza

Israel and Egypt have imposed varying degrees of a blockade on Gaza since Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007. Israel says the blockade is needed to prevent Hamas from importing arms, while critics say it amounts to collective punishment of Gaza's Palestinian population.

Israel sealed off Gaza from all aid in the early days of the war ignited by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, but later relented under U.S. pressure. In early March, shortly before [Israel ended a ceasefire with Hamas](#), the country

again blocked all imports, including food, fuel and medicine.

Hamas-led militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the Oct. 7 attack and abducted 251 hostages. Most have been released in ceasefire agreements or other deals. Hamas still holds 55 hostages, more than half believed to be dead.

Israel's military campaign has killed more than 54,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants but has said that women and children make up most of the dead.

The war has destroyed vast areas of Gaza and displaced around 90% of the population, leaving people almost completely dependent on international aid.

Efforts to broker another truce have been deadlocked for months. Hamas says it will only release the remaining hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal. Israel has vowed to continue the war until all the captives are returned and Hamas is defeated, or disarmed and exiled.