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For immediate release

STATEMENT

ISRAEL: Israel needs to heed international calls for free flow of information

ARTICLE 19 is calling for an open, international, independent and impartial investigation into the use of lethal force by the Israeli Defence Forces which resulted in a number of deaths onboard the Gaza-bound flotilla on 31 May.

The blocking of all communication channels, including mobile phones, shortly after the assault, followed by the arbitrary detention of journalists, human rights monitors and others who were travelling onboard the flotilla, are evidence of censorship and a news blackout by Israeli state authorities. Such actions curtail the free flow of information, as protected by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Israel is party.

The one-sided information originating from official Israeli sources on the circumstances surrounding the assault and the deaths restricts the right to information and minimises the possibilities for international public scrutiny of the actions of the Israeli Defence Forces and thus for accountability.

As early as 1946, at its very first session, in the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 59(I) which states that *“Freedom of information is a fundamental human right and ... the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated.”*

Freedom of expression, including access to information, is also essential to the realization of what is commonly referred to as the “right to truth.” The UN Commission on Human Rights, at its 61st session, adopted Resolution 2005/66, which *“[r]ecognizes the importance of respecting and ensuring the right to the truth so as to contribute to ending impunity and to promote and protect human rights.”*

The investigation into the assault against the flotilla must be open, international, impartial and independent. It should focus on the legality of the Israeli assault in international waters and thus the legality of the blockade, and the proportionality of the use of force. An international investigation team should be allowed access to government-held

information on the matter, as well as direct access to those involved in the assault, witnesses and those subsequently detained.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.