

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Anne-Marie Slaughter [redacted]
Sent: Tuesday, June 21, 2011 11:08 PM
To: H
Cc: Sullivan, Jacob J; Mills, Cheryl D; Abedin, Huma
Subject: Alice Walker on why she is sailing to Gaza

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This was posted on the CNN website tonight. NB her description of her Jewish husband – this is movement that is going to grow and grow and that is going to be impossible to stop.

Editor's note: Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker will join an international flotilla of boats sailing to Gaza to challenge Israel's blockade of the territory. Here, Walker, best known for her 1983 novel "The Color Purple," explains why she will be taking part.

Why am I going on the Freedom Flotilla II to Gaza? I ask myself this, even though the answer is: What else would I do? I am in my sixty-seventh year, having lived already a long and fruitful life, one with which I am content.

It seems to me that during this period of eldering it is good to reap the harvest of one's understanding of what is important, and to share this, especially with the young. How are they to learn, otherwise?

Our boat, The Audacity of Hope, will be carrying letters to the people of Gaza. Letters expressing solidarity and love. That is all its cargo will consist of. If the Israeli military attacks us, it will be as if they attacked the mailman. This should go down hilariously in the annals of history. But if they insist on attacking us, wounding us, even murdering us, as they did some of the activists in the last flotilla, Freedom Flotilla I, what is to be done?

There is a scene in the movie "Gandhi" that is very moving to me: it is when the unarmed Indian protesters line up to confront the armed forces of the British Empire. The soldiers beat them unmercifully, but the Indians, their broken and dead lifted tenderly out of the fray, keep coming.

Alongside this image of brave followers of Gandhi there is for me an awareness of paying off a debt to the Jewish civil rights activists who faced death to come to the side of black people in the South in our time of need. I am especially indebted to Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman who heard our calls for help - our government then as now glacially slow in providing protection to non-violent protestors-and came to stand with us.

They got as far as the truncheons and bullets of a few "good ol' boys" of Neshoba County, Mississippi and were beaten and shot to death along with James Cheney, a young black man of formidable courage who died with them. So, even though our boat will be called The Audacity of Hope, it will fly the Goodman, Cheney, Schwerner flag in my own heart.

And what of the children of Palestine, who were ignored in our President's latest speech on Israel and Palestine, and whose impoverished, terrorized, segregated existence was mocked by the standing ovations recently given in the U.S. Congress to the prime minister of Israel?

I see children, all children, as humanity's most precious resource, because it will be to them that the care of the planet will always be left. One child must never be set above another, even in casual conversation, not to mention in speeches that circle the globe.

As adults, we must affirm, constantly, that the Arab child, the Muslim child, the Palestinian child, the African child, the Jewish child, the Christian child, the American child, the Chinese child, the Israeli child, the Native American child, etc., is equal to all others on the planet. We must do everything in our power to cease the behavior that makes children everywhere feel afraid.

I once asked my best friend and husband during the era of segregation, who was as staunch a defender of black people's human rights as anyone I'd ever met: how did you find your way to us, to black people, who so needed you? What force shaped your response to the great injustice facing people of color of that time?

I thought he might say the speeches, the marches, the example of Martin Luther King, Jr. or of others in the Movement who exhibited impactful courage and grace. But no. Thinking back, he recounted an episode from his childhood that had led him, inevitably, to our struggle.

He was a little boy on his way home from Yeshiva, the Jewish school he attended after regular school let out. His mother, a bookkeeper, was still at work; he was alone. He was frequently harassed by older boys from regular school, and one day two of these boys snatched his yarmulke (skull cap), and, taunting him, ran off with it, eventually throwing it over a fence.

Two black boys appeared, saw his tears, assessed the situation, and took off after the boys who had taken his yarmulke. Chasing the boys down and catching them, they made them climb the fence, retrieve and dust off the yarmulke, and place it respectfully back on his head.

It is justice and respect that I want the world to dust off and put - without delay, and with tenderness - back on the head of the Palestinian child. It will be imperfect justice and respect because the injustice and disrespect have been so severe. But I believe we are right to try.

That is why I sail.