

**Amnesty International
Press Release**

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**United States Delivers Massive New Weapons Shipment to Israel, Confirmed by Pentagon,
Says Amnesty International**

Human Rights Organization Urges President Obama to Halt Further Exports

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(New York) -- Amnesty International today revealed that the United States has sent a massive new shipment of arms to [Israel](#)-- about 14,000 tons worth -- despite evidence that U.S. weapons were misused against civilians in the Gaza attacks. The unloading of the shipment in Israel was confirmed by the Pentagon. The human rights organization called on President Obama to suspend future arms shipments to Israel until there is no longer substantial risk of human rights violations.

Amnesty International said the Wehr Elbe, a German cargo ship, which was chartered and controlled by the U.S Military Sealift Command, docked and unloaded its cargo on March 22 at the Israeli port of Ashdod, about 25 miles north of Gaza.

The Pentagon confirmed the successful unloading of the ship, which left the United States for Israel last December 20, a week before the start of Israel's attacks on Gaza. Reportedly, the ship carried 989 containers of munitions, each of them 20 feet long with a total estimated net weight of 14,000 tons.

"Legally and morally, this U.S. arms shipment should have been halted by the Obama administration given the evidence of war crimes resulting from military equipment and munitions of this kind used by the Israeli forces," said Brian Wood, arms control campaign manager for Amnesty International. "Arms supplies in these circumstances are contrary to provisions in U.S. law."

Amnesty International has issued documented evidence that white phosphorus and other weapons supplied by the United States were used to carry out serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes in Gaza. The human rights organization provided comprehensive details on munitions used in the fighting in a 37-page briefing paper, *Fueling Conflict: Foreign Arms Supplies to Israel/Gaza*, in February.

Asked about the Wehr Elbe, a Pentagon spokesperson confirmed to Amnesty International that "the unloading of the entire U.S. munitions shipment was successfully completed at Ashdod [Israel] on March 22." The spokesperson said that the shipment was destined for a U.S. pre-positioned ammunition stockpile in Israel.

Under a U.S.-Israel agreement, munitions from this stockpile may be transferred for Israeli use if necessary. A State Department official told Amnesty International that Israel's use of U.S. weapons during the Gaza conflict are under review to see if Israel complied with U.S. law, but a conclusion has not yet been reached.

"There is a great risk that the new munitions may be used by the Israeli military to commit further violations of international law, like the ones committed during the war in Gaza," said Wood. "We are urging all governments to impose an immediate and comprehensive suspension of arms to Israel, and to all Palestinian armed groups, until there is no longer a substantial risk of serious human rights violations."

"The United States government now has ample evidence from the Gaza attacks indicating that the arms it is sending to Israel have been misused to kill and injure men, women and children and to destroy hundreds of millions of dollars of property. It can no longer send weapons to Israel while ignoring these facts," said Curt Goering, senior deputy executive director, Amnesty International USA, who was in the region during the Gaza crisis.

The United States was by far the largest supplier of weapons to Israel between 2004 and 2008. The U.S. government is

also due to provide \$30 billion in military aid to Israel, despite the blatant misuse of weaponry and munitions in Gaza and Lebanon by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). President Obama, according to published reports, has no plans to cut the billions of dollars in military aid promised to Israel under a new 10-year contract agreed in 2007 by the Bush administration. This new contract is a 25 percent increase, compared to the last contract agreed by the previous U.S. administration.

Amnesty International has documented suspected war crimes committed by the IDF and by Palestinian armed groups in Gaza. On January 15, Amnesty International called on all governments to immediately suspend arms transfers to all parties to the Gaza conflict to prevent further violations being committed using munitions and other military equipment.

Background:

The Wehr Elbe sailed from North Carolina on December 20, after collecting its large cargo of U.S. munitions and was initially bound for the port of Navipe-Astakos on the west coast of Greece. Its transponder signal disappeared on January 12 when the vessel was sailing near Astakos. The ship was unable to dock due to a protest by the Greek Stop the War Coalition. The vessel was then tracked as it passed through the port of Augusta, on the Italian island of Sicily, and then near Gibraltar in mid-February, before reappearing on March 23 en route from Ashdod to the Black Sea port of Odessa where it docked on March 26 in berth 7. Amnesty International is now aware that the vessel docked in Ashdod on March 22 and reportedly offloaded over 300 containers.

Amnesty International first drew attention to this arms ship's voyage on January 15. The ship's charter, authorized by the Bush administration a week before Israel launched its attack on Gaza, was to carry 989 shipping containers of "containerized ammunition and other containerized ammunition supplies" from Sunny Point Military Ocean Terminal, North Carolina, to Ashdod, as listed in the contract. U.S. Military Sealift Command charters for a further two U.S. munitions shipments from Navipe-Astakos (Greece) to Ashdod, which explicitly included white phosphorus munitions, were announced on December 31 during the Gaza conflict and then cancelled on January 9, but a U.S. military spokesperson subsequently confirmed that the Pentagon was still seeking a way to also deliver those munitions.

Section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act stipulates that "no security assistance may be provided to any country, the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights." However, security assistance may be provided if the president certifies that "extraordinary circumstances" exist. Section 4 of the Arms Export Control Act authorizes the supply of U.S. military equipment and training only for lawful purposes of internal security, "legitimate self-defense," or participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations or other operations consistent with the U.N. Charter. The Leahy Law prohibits the United States from providing most forms of security assistance to any military or police unit when there is "credible evidence" that members of the unit are committing gross human rights violations.

Amnesty International is a Nobel Peace Prize-winning grassroots activist organization with more than 2.2 million supporters, activists and volunteers in more than 150 countries campaigning for human rights worldwide. The organization investigates and exposes abuses, educates and mobilizes the public, and works to protect people wherever justice, freedom, truth and dignity are denied.

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