



**Remarks by Iara Lee, Cultures of Resistance and  
Ramzi Kysia, Free Gaza Movement  
Acceptance of Damu Smith Memorial Activist Award  
Gala Awards Dinner, July 24, 2010**

**Iara Lee, Cultures of Resistance**

I humbly accept this award on behalf of the nine courageous humanitarians who were murdered on May 31st and on behalf of their families, as well as everyone else who has lost their life protesting the inhumane imprisonment of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Their martyrdom showed the entire world the kind of courage that can only come from a sincere and deep love for humanity.

We must preserve and cherish their memory as a monument to this love, and never forget the sacrifice they made for the sake of all humanity, regardless of race, religion, or politics.

I want to thank the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation for all of their courageous work over the years, and in particular for providing a venue where truth can be heard.

The video our camera team smuggled out shows how a diverse group of people whose goal was to share solidarity and deliver humanitarian aid were terrorized on the open seas. This fundamental truth has been flagrantly omitted or distorted in mainstream media accounts of what happened, so when you leave here, show this video to your friends, and to their friends.

We here in the United States are on the frontlines of the media struggle to show the truth of what is happening in occupied Palestine, and to help bring this injustice to an end.

**Ramzi Kysia, Free Gaza Movement**

What does it mean to be a peace & justice worker in today's world? It can be overwhelming to stare, wide-eyed, into the face of a 2-trillion dollar a year global war machine, fed by fear-mongering politicians and their 'embedded' media the world over, all working to promote the ridiculous idea that violence and oppression should, or even can, be positive and necessary forces in our lives. Yet we persevere. Out-shouted and out-spent a million to one, we persevere. And, in a movement largely funded by bake sales and potluck dinners, our ability to survive - let alone make our voices heard and move public opinion - has been nothing short of amazing.

This isn't testament to any special qualities or talents that we possess as peaceworkers. We suffer from all the

same weaknesses and failings that plague all human beings. Our successes and our endurance are instead a reflection of the fact that war and oppression - despite being with us from our birth - are not the natural state of humankind. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr used to say: 'The arc of human history bends toward justice.' Each of us here today is a small part of that larger global struggle. And we should never underestimate the ability of a small group of determined people to move the entire world.

In August 2008, 44 ordinary people from 17 different countries boarded 2 small wooden fishing boats in Cyprus and sailed to Palestine, successfully challenging the illegal Israeli blockade, becoming the first international ships to sail to Gaza since 1967. Since then we in the Free Gaza Movement have organized 8 more sea missions, arriving to Gaza's shores on 5 occasions, and we have been violently stopped by the Israeli military on four missions, most tragically with the massacre last month on the Freedom Flotilla.

Despite the challenges and risks we face in the this work, we know how necessary it is, as internationals, to work with our Palestinian partners to directly challenge the Occupation. And we also know that the risks we voluntarily assume are much less than those unjustly imposed every day on our sisters and brothers in Palestine.

On behalf of all my friends and colleagues in Free Gaza, thank you for this award. We would like to accept it both in recognition for the work we have already done, but also as a challenge for us to continue and intensify our efforts. We will sail to Gaza again and again and again, until this siege is forever ended and the people of Palestine have free access to the rest of the world. Thank you.