**'Gaza blockade is legitimate'**

Israel defends its actions at the UN Human Rights Committee.

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July 14, 2010

JPOST

*http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=181410*

Israel defended its right to stop aid ships headed for the Gaza Strip during a hearing of the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva on Wednesday, AFP reported.

The two-day committee hearing began on Tuesday, discussing whether Israel was violating obligations under the UN treaty on civil and political rights.

"No ship can breach this blockade, be they civil or military ships. Whoever violates the blockade is heading for retaliation," Israeli envoy Sari Rubenstein reportedly told the Human Rights Committee. "The blockade is legitimate. Under international law... a blockade can be imposed on the sea," she added.

"These are not activists for peace, but messengers of death," Israeli ambassador Aharon Leshno Yaar said, in reference to those aboard the Mavi Marmara, on the second day of the session.

"We cannot sweep aside with a stroke of the hand the application of the treaty [on civil and political rights] in the Palestinian territories," said a member of the committee, Christine Chanet, according to AFP's report.

The UN said Israel is responsible for Gaza's 1.5 million population as it controls access to its sea and air ports. Israel said it is not an occupier, because as it does not control territory within the Gaza Strip.