

# leaves Damascus



Convoy's participants in Turkey

## Turkey

As the vehicles crossed into Turkey the reception from the local population went wild.

"Our Turkish friends cheered us on with shouts of 'Filistine Yolacik !' - which means 'a lifeline from Turkey to Gaza'," wrote convoy leader George Galloway in a Tweet.

A full-blown rally alongside press helicopters greeted the VIVA Palestina convoy in Istanbul.

"The reception we've had from ordinary Turkish people, from its government, and from the Union of Health Work Committees the (IHH) has been absolutely phenomenal," VIVA convoy leader, Kevin Ovenden said

"Their support and enthusiasm has boosted the morale of the convoy immeasurably, and their obvious support and love for the people of Gaza has been an inspiration to us."

Several vehicles in the convoy broke down along the route and forty-seven vehicles from the US branch of VIVA Palestina which were scheduled to join the fleet in Istanbul failed to get the adequate documentation on time, but Turkish NGO IHH organised 60 new vans - more than replenishing numbers.

## Syria

Fears of a lengthy and tedious border crossing into Syria were completely dispelled on Sunday morning when the convoy passed the 'no man's land' separating the two countries to find massive signs reading: "Long lives the Palestine convoy led by independent MP Mr George Galawai." Schoolchildren and well-wishers lined the streets and presented the convoy with single red roses.

"Our entry into Syria was spectacular," Overton said. "I met a woman today who has donated three million liras (€15,500) to the convoy. "She is just one of many Syrians who have put a lot of faith in us and I am now more determined than ever to get through and make sure all the hard work that has gone into this comes to fruition." Arriving at Damascus Airport on Monday, Galloway praised the authorities saying: "Syrian leadership, people and government always stand by the Palestinian people and those who support them."

When they leave Damascus this morning the VIVA Palestina troop will be joined by seven trucks carrying about 150 tonnes of food, medical supplies and clothes, donated by the Syrian High Committee for Supporting Palestinian People and Resisting Zionist Occupation.

## Famous well wishers

"We welcome the Viva Palestina convoy and its initiative that will bring assistance to Gaza that is so desperately needed. We call on Israel to lift the siege and allow the people of Gaza to be able to get on with rebuilding their homes, schools, hospitals and lives."

**CORIN REDGRAVE AND KIKA MARKHAM (ACTORS)**

"To everyone taking part in the third ViVA convoy I wish you all the very best of luck, and your efforts for the people in Gaza just warms my heart. You bring hope, solidarity, peace and love from right across the world. I am with you all the way in spirit."

**NOAM CHOMSKY, RENOWNED US ACADEMIC**

"I would like to express my full support for the VIVA Palestina convoy which leaves in December. The ongoing siege of Gaza is a crime against humanity, as was the Israeli attack last year. British support for the relief efforts is a contribution to the solution of a human problem. I wish the convoy all success."

**TONY BENN, HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGNER AND FORMER LABOR LEADER**

"We are determined to cross into Gaza and no matter what happens we've achieved a success for the movement in support for the Palestinian people."

**CHARLES BARON, NEW YORK CITY COUNCILLOR WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE JULY TRIP AND HELPED NEGOTIATE 24-HOUR PASSAGE INTO GAZA**

## Egypt / Gaza

After crossing Jordan over the next few days the convoy is expected to reach the Rafah Egypt-Gaza border crossing on December 27. But rumours abound that amidst US and Israeli pressure to halt the expedition, the convoy will be stopped by Egyptian authorities from entering Gaza through the sole crossing into the Strip. "We have every right to expect to be let through and we have every right to expect that our efforts will not only be allowed but will be facilitated by the authorities," Ovenden told Baladna. "But we are prepared for all situations." VIVA Palestina organizers have called on the Turkish President Abdullah Gul to press Egyptian counterpart Hosni Mubarak to allow the convoy through. UK Foreign Minister, David Miliband has also contacted the Egyptians to request safe passage for the group.