Malaysian PM in Solidarity Visit to Gaza

Malaysia’s prime minister has defied Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip to visit the Palestinian enclave, a move that has earned the ire of West Bank leaders, despite Najib’s pledge of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Najib Razak, along with a group of Malaysian ministers, crossed into Gaza on Tuesday via its land border with Egypt for what he described as a humanitarian visit.

He told a joint news conference in Gaza City with Hamas leader Ismail Haniya that he came “to express my solidarity with the Palestinian people.”

“This is a humanitarian visit to express our deep concerns for what happens to the Palestinian people in Gaza and to express our opposition to the aggression on Gaza,” he added.

But the visit drew criticism from the office of Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, who also heads the Fatah movement.

“The Palestinian presidency announces its rejection and condemnation of the Malaysian prime minister’s visit to Gaza,” a statement carried on the official WAFA news agency said.

“It undermines Palestinian representation and reinforces the division and does not serve Palestinian interests,” it continued, saying Abbas’ bureau would ask Kuala Lumpur “for clarification.”

Call for Reconciliation

Najib said his visit was intended “to show solidarity” and called for renewed reconciliation efforts between the Hamas and the rival Fatah party, including attempts to form a consensus government to pave the way for new elections.
“We believe in this unity government and we pray to Allah that the talks will be successful and a united government will become a reality in the near future,” Najib said.

Najib visited a Gaza university and government offices, as well as the family of top Hamas military chief Ahmed Al-Jaabari, whose assassination by Israel in November started an eight-day war in which more than 160 Palestinians and six Israelis died.

Before leaving for Egypt, he laid the first stone at a Malaysian-funded school.

Najib was the second world leader in recent months to defy the five-year blockade and accept an invitation from Hamas, which Western states regard as a terrorist group.

Qatar’s emir, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, made a brief visit to Gaza in October and promised $400 million in aid for infrastructure.

On February 9, Moncef Marzouki, Tunisian president, is scheduled to make his first trip to the coastal strip, according to Hamas officials.

The visits have been made possible in part by Egypt’s decision to loosen some of the restrictions on travel through its Rafah border crossing with Gaza, the only entry point to bypass Israel.

(Agencies via Al Jazeera – www.aljazeera.com)