

‘Maybe we should talk about my books’

Henning Mankell

The bestselling Swedish crime writer Henning Mankell, whose detective novels featuring Kurt Wallander have sold almost 30 million copies worldwide, was aboard the Swedish ship Sofia, one of six ships in the flotilla carrying aid to Gaza. On 31 May, the 25-strong crew, including Mankell, were kidnapped on the high seas and taken to Israel where they were held in custody. A few days later, following his deportation from Israel, Mr Mankell told a press conference in Berlin of his experiences. We print short excerpts.

‘I am against the politics of Israel today because that is a sort of an apartheid. I was against that sort of politics in South Africa, and I am against it now.’

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‘... It was an act of sea piracy when they attacked the boat, when they took the boat to Israel, we were actually kidnapped ... Of course, I am not an anti-semiter. I must maybe say that I was in Israel, in Palestine, just one month ago. I was part of a Palestinian literary festival – I visited Hebron and Ramallah. I was also there last year, and I can assure you that every time I go to Israel I meet more and more Israeli activists. That says to me that the situation now is horrifying. It can’t continue. They also participate in trying to find ways that solidarity can work to find a solution to all the problems. And I guess this is growing day to day as more and more people understand the need to discontinue this unbearable situation.

I discuss with all my Jewish friends in Europe who are very worried about what is happening. I can tell you – I would say it is funny but there is nothing funny about this – but when I had been taken to Israel I was put in front of, I don’t know whether he was a policeman or whether he was a judge. I don’t know because they don’t tell you their names. I had this man from the foreign department to stay by my side and that man said to me ... I asked him “what am I charged with?”

He said, “you are charged with entering Israel illegally”.

I said, “this is absolutely absurd. How can I be charged with this when you brought me here. I didn’t want to come.”

And then he didn't want to discuss anymore, and I said, "please, I want to discuss more with you," and then he started to talk about something else.

He said, "I know who you are and I read your books and I like them."

"Oh that's nice," I said. "OK, maybe we should talk about my books then if you don't want to talk about the charges."

"No, I don't want to do that, but maybe I sometimes go to Europe."

Then I say, "OK, I will give you my telephone number in Sweden so next time you go to Sweden, if you let me out, if you don't send me to prison, let's talk about what is happening here."

He looked at me. "Do you mean that?"

"Yes," then I looked up my phone number and gave it to him. After that I was sent away to be deported.

But I think I tried to talk with him because I believe in the rational mind. There must be a solution. Of course the Jewish people have to be a very important part of that solution. I try to listen and I try to talk to people.'

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'In a way I am sad that now I know that I will not be able to go back to Jerusalem because they won't let me in. But this is maybe the price one has to pay.'