

Marathon man banned from Gaza

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Bethlehem – Ma'an – Israel turned away an Italian marathon runner at the Erez border crossing on Saturday, preventing him from completing the Gaza leg of his 540 kilometer "Run For Love" from Jerusalem, through Gaza, to the pinnacle of Mount Sinai in Egypt.



[Ma'anImages]

"I am very disappointed because there is no politics, no religion, nothing controversial in my Run For Love," runner Max Calderan told a news conference in Jerusalem. "I run simply in the name of peace."

Calderan had planned to run the Gaza portion of the five-day mega marathon in coordination with the UN refugee agency UNRWA. Having been told by the Israeli authorities initially that he could go into Gaza, he said, and having been given assurances from the Israeli Ministry of Sport, he was still barred.

Asked if the Gaza run posed any security risk, four-time marathon champion Calderan said, "security was guaranteed by the United Nations and that this was just an excuse by the Israeli authorities to keep him out of Gaza".

Responding to the decision to ban Calderan UNRWA Spokesperson Christopher Guinness said, "It seems that marathon runners have now joined that list of banned items. Light bulbs, detergent, building materials and now marathon men," according to a statement.

"To make matters worse," said Guinness' statement, "we had young athletes, disabled children waiting to run with Max inside Gaza. They have been deprived of some sportive fun. Parents everywhere will surely find this a bewildering decision."

According to UNRWA, Calderan will now travel from Jerusalem to Egypt by car where he will resume his run, a further 250 kilometers to the top of Mount Sinai.

Israel's Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) had not at time of writing returned a phone call from Ma'an regarding Calderan's case. Israeli spokespersons told other reporters they had not heard previously of his application to enter Gaza.