

## UNRWA-Sponsored 'Run for Love' - PA is 'Palestine' (INN) ISRAEL NATIONAL NEWS) by Hana Levi Julian 05/24/09

(IsraelINN.com) 'Extreme' desert runner Max Calderan's "Run for Love" may be more about politics than peace, despite claims by United Nations spokesman Chris Gunness that the event has little to do with religion or politics.

Nonetheless, Calderan found out the hard way that not all marathons are alike, when he encountered a snag at the Erez Crossing into Gaza, where IDF officials stopped him right in his tracks.

The runner, backed by Chris Gunness, Jerusalem-based spokesman for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), was told by government officials from the Ministry of Sport, the Foreign Ministry and the IDF that he would not be able to complete his politically-charged run by crossing into Gaza. However, he ignored the lack of authorization and made the 15-hour run anyway, apparently hoping he would be able to sweet-talk his way through the Erez Crossing.

It didn't happen.

Gunness told Israel National News on Sunday that Calderan's 540-kilometer run was to take him "from Jerusalem to the top of Mt. Sinai." He will drive to Taba instead in order to continue the run to reach his goal.

The timing, which comes one week prior to the Jewish holiday of Shavuot (Festival of Weeks), in which Jews celebrate the receiving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, was a coincidence, said Gunness. The U.N. spokesman said the run was not intended to make any political statement - though the runner began it by draping himself in a PA flag.

"But then he became the latest item on the list of things banned from Gaza," Gunness said. "Without any explanation, the Israeli authorities banned him. He was to be the guest of UNRWA in Gaza where some of Gaza's most promising athletes, including disabled athletes, were due to run with him."

Gunness expressed frustration at Israel's unwillingness to allow Calderan to continue his run as planned. "So Marathon Runners have now joined the ever-growing loony list of items banned from Gaza," he complained. "I know he runs like a long range rocket, but Max's "Run for Love" isn't a threat to anyone," Gunness scoffed. "Sport could have been such a solid bridge for peace, as many Israeli sportspeople know. It's puzzling that an Italian Marathon Man running from Jerusalem to Mount Sinai could be barred in this way."

"He was to be our guest in Gaza," Gunness said. "We have 10,000 people on the ground there, and none have been kidnapped. Security is not the issue," he told Israel National News. Nor did he think politics was the problem. "This was not a political event," he said. Asked if Calderan was Jewish, Gunness turned to the runner and asked him. "No religion, no politics, no nothing. Calderan is an atheist, apolitical," he replied.

But the photos and publicity materials sent to Israel National News by Calderan's personal public relations representative told a different tale.

For starters, the run didn't begin, as billed by UNRWA, in Jerusalem. The "Run for Love," actually began early Friday in Ramallah, the seat of the PA government, according to Calderan's publicity package.

The publicity materials also state that runner plans to traverse the territories of "Egypt, Israel, Palestine" -- conferring upon the Palestinian Authority a status that even the United Nations itself has not yet approved, that of a sovereign state.