

POSITION PAPER: HUMANITARIAN & POLITICAL CRISIS IN GAZA



Policy Recommendations for Canada

The following are recommendations in terms of dealing with the Israeli-imposed humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and in terms of stimulating Palestinian unity between the West Bank and Gaza.

- A. Canada must insist that Israel's blockade of Gaza cease immediately. Since September, when Israel declared Gaza as "hostile territory," the Israelis have increasingly restricted consumer and commercial goods, medical supplies, fuel and other staples. They have also blocked virtually all Palestinian exports. Canada must immediately condemn Israel's starvation blockade, as it runs counter to Canada's moral principles, and counter to Israel's obligations as the military occupier to ensure the health and protection of the civilian population under the 4th Geneva Conventions.
- B. Canada must insist that Israel stop hampering international aid to Palestinians. In recent months, especially in Gaza, Israel has been making the work of international/UN aid agencies increasingly difficult. For example, the inability to get supplies to Gaza – because of Israel's blockade – has led to the suspension of approximately \$200 million in UN humanitarian programs.
- C. Canada must provide humanitarian aid to Palestinians. Late in 2007, UNRWA and other UN organizations issued their consolidated appeal for international humanitarian aid for the Palestinians. This aid is slated to be channelled through UN humanitarian organizations for Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza. As of the end of 2007, Canada had not yet made its donation to this fund.
- D. Canada must call on Israel and Palestinian parties to respect international humanitarian law. Targeting of civilians by any militant party is strictly forbidden under international law. Israeli air strikes, artillery shelling, assassinations, and destruction of property must stop, as should the launching of rockets against Israeli border towns by Palestinian armed groups.
- E. Canada must encourage Hamas and Fatah to reverse steps that are entrenching separation between Gaza and the West Bank. Ultimately, nobody is served – certainly not the Palestinians – by prolonging the division between the West Bank and Gaza. Differences between the civil authority and the living conditions in the two territories will only foster increased division over time. The two territories must be re-unified, civil law and order maintained, and their civilian populations treated humanely and equitably, by Israel, the Palestinian security elements, and the international community.

A: Canada must insist that Israel's blockade of Gaza stop immediately

1. Canada must ask that Israel cease its illegal occupation of Palestine. It is quite paradoxical that Canada has of recent favoured Israeli "security" concerns over the Palestinian security, legal and humanitarian concerns. As Israel controls the borders, coast, commerce, airspace, and radio/TV of Gaza; and as Israel invades and attacks Gaza at will, it is considered the military occupier of Gaza. As such, it has obligations under international law to ensure the safety and well-being of the civilian population in Gaza. Ultimately, Canada must take diplomatic and political steps to end the Israeli occupation, and thus address this core injustice.
2. Canada must demand that Israel immediately permit the resumption of regular fuel deliveries to Gaza. While all aspects of Israel's blockade are brutal, Israel's fuel restrictions on Gaza are particularly inhumane. With Gaza's main power plant severely disabled by Israel in 2006, Gazans depend heavily on electric generators, and the fuel that supplies them. The lack of fuel has severely impacted hospitals, primary health care facilities, water and waste-water treatment, as well as all other sectors.
3. Canada must insist that Israel restore the flow of medical supplies to Gaza. Again, it is particularly cruel and unlawful for Israel to prevent the delivery of medical supplies to Gaza. Dozens of drugs

from the “Essential Drug List” are regularly out-of-stock in Gaza, including pediatric drugs, antibiotics and treatments for chronic disease.

4. Canada must petition for a dignified existence for all Palestinians. In its appeal to allow Palestinians to lead dignified lives, the ICRC states, “The 1.4 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip continue to pay for conflict and economic containment with their health and livelihoods.” Whether exports, or raw material imports, exit visas for students, or medical evacuations, they are all part of the right of Palestinians to lead normal, dignified lives.

B: Canada must insist that Israel stop hampering aid to Palestinians

1. Canada must demand that Israel permit international aid in Gaza. Israeli import restrictions in Gaza have led to the suspension of more than \$200 million worth of UN aid programming, including shelter and housing projects for 27,000 refugees and construction at three major hospitals. Israel informed UNRWA in late in 2007 of many new administrative barriers to be imposed throughout occupied Palestine. These obstacles will significantly increase UNRWA operating costs, will reduce accessibility to at-risk communities, and will delay emergency aid in many situations.

C: Canada must provide humanitarian aid to Palestinians

1. To get value for its aid money, Canada must insist that Israel loosen controls on movement and access. The PA, as well as economic institutions like the World Bank forecast very modest growth (only 6 percent over 3 years) for a rejuvenated Palestine if Israel does not relax its oppressive controls on movement in the West Bank and Gaza.
2. Canada must respond to the UNRWA Emergency Appeal for 2008. Because of Israel’s brutal treatment of Palestinians, especially in Gaza, UNRWA’s needs exceed its means. Canada must immediately contribute generously to UNRWA’s emergency appeal of November 2007. (Canada donated \$2 million to UNRWA’s 2007 appeal for the refugees displaced from Nahr El-Barid camp in North Lebanon.)
3. In allocating its international aid, Canada must apply principles of impartiality, neutrality and humanity. Both morally, and under international aid norms, withholding humanitarian or development aid because of the Palestinian people’s election choices (or because of their current civil authority) violates moral principles of impartiality, neutrality, and humanity.

E: Canada must encourage a unified Palestinian nation

1. To be accepted as a player in the Middle East, Canada must re-establish its neutrality. Several years of unquestioned support of Israel, and relative disdain for Palestinian needs, rights and choices, has led to Canada’s irrelevance in the Middle East. Canada can and must make a place for itself through neutral policies based on international law and sound principles. Once it has done this, it can again become a credible advisor and facilitator on Middle East issues.
2. Canada must encourage a breakthrough in Palestinian unity, and the international response to it. While no easy task, Canada must seek to facilitate some of the following:
 - Cessation of incitement and infighting among Palestinians.
 - Cessation of all unnecessary interference with civil life by all security elements.
 - A reopening of travel between Gaza and the West Bank.
 - A return to the prior status quo under the Unity Government of early 2007, which would require of Hamas: giving up of control of Gaza and the PA institutions it seized in June, 2007; and of Fatah: agreeing to rescind the June, 2007 PLO decision to hold early presidential and legislative elections, as well as other PLO and presidential decrees of June 14, 2007.
 - Negotiation of a new power-sharing agreement, enhanced from the Unity model of 2007.
 - International recognition of the new Palestinian power-sharing agreement.