Policy Recommendations for Canada

A. Canada should clarify its commitment of funding to UNRWA. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the caretaker human development and relief agency for Palestinian refugees. UNRWA provides educational programs, relief and social services, health programs, microenterprise and microfinance programs, and emergency relief. In Jan., 2010, the Canadian government announced it would curtail funding to UNRWA and redirect aid to projects in the Palestinian Authority (PA). But Canada’s decision will be counterproductive if it seeks to address the root causes of extremism and promote peace and stability between Israel and Palestine.

B. Canada should stop interfering in Palestinian politics. Canada’s redirection of aid towards the PA is a part of Canada’s strategy of supporting the Fatah Palestinian political party over Hamas, despite the strategy’s failures. The provocations of the Fatah security forces that Canada helped fund and train precipitated the Hamas takeover of Gaza. After the takeover, Canada reinstated its funding to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and expanded its “security” funding. Canada’s picking of sides has done nothing to improve the situation in Israel-Palestine.

A: Canada should re-commit to the generous funding of UNRWA

1. Canada should recommit to developmental aid to Palestinians, through UNRWA and other channels. Canada should concentrate on aid to the Palestinians in accordance with the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutralirty. In 2009, Canada gave UNRWA US $18 M. This was down from US $28 M in 2008. UNRWA is distinctly capable of bettering the lives of Palestinians because of its vast reach, broad range of programs and services, and decades of work in the region.

2. Canada must rethink its 2009 decision to redirect UNRWA aid to the PA. UNRWA and the PA are entirely different entities: different sectors; different mandates; different governance. As the former Ambassador of Canada to Israel, Jordan, Egypt and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Michael Bell, wrote in the Globe and Mail in May, 2009, UNRWA “is Gaza’s lifeline to secular culture.” UNRWA provides schools and summer camps with an emphasis on sports, culture and arts, without which more children would be placed in programs run by militant groups. UNRWA brings a degree of stability to the lives of Palestinian refugees, and this is the surest antidote to the despair and frustration in which extremism breeds. UNRWA has in fact come under attack by Islamists because of the secular values it represents and promotes.

The Canadian government has not justified its decision to redirect aid from UNRWA to the PA at a time when an estimated 80% of Palestinians in Gaza, as well as hundreds of thousands elsewhere, depend on it to meet their basic needs. In 2009, for the first time ever, Canada gave no money to UNRWA’s general fund which supports programs in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

3. Canada must differentiate between fact and fiction in its policy-making. There are many myths about UNRWA – some of them repeated by Cabinet ministers – which have been repeatedly and verifiably disproven. It is important that the Canadian government’s decision-making vis-à-vis UNRWA be based on the facts of the organization’s history of accountability and effectiveness, and not myths, which have included:

- **Myth: Oversight of UNRWA funds is not strong.** UNRWA provides regular reports of both ongoing and emergency operations, which provide a comprehensive view of the Palestinian refugee populations served, and the allocation of funds to the programs. Audits done by the US General Accountability Office found no evidence of aid passing to terrorists via UNRWA.

- **Myth: UNRWA ignores militant activity in the Palestinian refugee camps.** UNRWA does not run refugee camps. UNRWA simply provides services to refugees, about a third of whom live in the refugee camps. Not only has UNRWA never had a mandate to administer the camps, it has no enforcement or security force to do so. This responsibility has remained with the host countries of the camps, or with Israel.
Myth: UNRWA supports an infrastructure of terror in its ranks. UNRWA maintains strict standards of conduct for its staff and the use of its facilities. In regards to staff on-duty and off-duty behaviour, UNRWA has extensive “Staff Rules and Regulations” which dictate acceptable activities of its staff, regardless of where or when such activities take place. UNRWA shares the names of all staff with host governments (including the PA and Israel). The list of UNRWA employees has also been verified against the UN-maintained terror list.

Myth: UNRWA perpetrates rather than solves the Palestine refugee situation. UNRWA was not set up to provide a political solution the Palestinian refugee situation, but rather to address the humanitarian needs of the refugees pending a political settlement.

Myth: UNRWA could be replaced by the UN High Commission for Refugees. UNRWA and UNHCR are both UN agencies created by the international community to serve specific refugee populations. UNRWA deals specifically with Palestinian refugees and their unique political situation.

Myth: UNRWA encourages a culture of dependency among Palestinian refugees.UNRWA encourages sufficient levels of dependency among the refugees, but it does not perpetuate the culture of dependency. The primary goal of UNRWA is to help refugees live independently and support the development of the Palestinian people.

4. **Canada should not earmark UNRWA donations for emergency funds only.** In 2009, Canada earmarked its entire UNRWA donation for the Emergency Fund only, and $15 M of that for food security and cash assistance only. Such an approach suggests that Canada wants to view its UNRWA contribution as “humanitarian aid,” vs. viewing it as an investment in the future of the Palestinian people, and in the region. Viewed as humanitarian aid, this donation risks being dropped entirely if things “cool off” in the region. Viewed as an investment, Canada lives up to its obligation to invest in long-term development of the Palestinian people, improve livelihoods, and to promote a just resolution of the conflict for Palestinian refugees.

5. **Canada must provide evidence of follow through with its Jan., 2008 promise of $300 million in aid over five years to Palestinians.** Publicly-available information on Canadian aid programs is spotty and difficult to quantify.

**B: Canada should stop interfering in Palestinian politics**

1. **Canada must not subvert Palestinian democracy.** Vic Toews, president of Canada’s Treasury Board, said that the redirecting of Canadian aid from UNRWA to the PA would “ensure accountability and foster democracy in the PA.” It is misleading for Canada to suggest that its intention is to support democracy in the PA when it has worked actively to undermine it. After Hamas won the 2006 legislative elections, judged to be free and fair, Canada cut funding to the PA. It subsequently helped train and fund forces loyal to Fatah in Gaza (i.e. with the Dayton project), which ultimately helped precipitate the Hamas takeover of Gaza and the breakup of the Palestinian Unity Government. Only then did Canada reinstate funding to the PA. In a decidedly undemocratic move, the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah, unilaterally extended his term in office.

2. **Canada must justify its claims of improved accountability.** While the Canadian government has claimed that the redirecting of aid to the PA would ensure greater accountability, it has not explained how. Palestinians voted in large part for Hamas in 2006 because they were tired of the corruption of earlier Fatah leadership. Yet this is the leadership Canada supports – contrary to the expressed democratic will of the Palestinian people in the last election. UNRWA, on the other hand, keeps meticulous records and publishes reports outlining where money was spent. If Canada wants to ensure accountability it should restore funding to UNRWA.

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