



## **Deputation to Toronto City Council Executive Committee**

### **Re: City's Anti-Discrimination Policy**

**May 28, 2013 – J.A. MacNeil**

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I am here representing Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, a secular, non-partisan grass-roots human rights organization with about 43,000 supporters, from all walks of life and backgrounds.

We ask you to accept the City Staff report, and to avoid introducing into the City's Anti-Discrimination Policy wording aimed at shielding a particular foreign government—Israel's—from criticism of its conduct.

That is a relatively modest request. City councils elsewhere are doing much more to uphold international law and human rights. For example, Dublin and Edinburgh have barred companies involved in Israel's illegal "settlements" in the Palestinian territories from bidding on municipal contracts. Four local city councils in South London, England took a similar step. Their actions make it clear to companies: "we will not do business with you if you are facilitating or benefiting from violations of international law." As well, Rio de Janeiro and other cities have twinned with Ramallah, the largest city in the occupied West Bank.

Toronto City Councillors may want to take similar actions down the road, as well as visiting Palestine themselves to see what the concern is about.

Last month one Toronto councillor drew an analogy between sharp criticism of Israel's conduct, and derogatory comments about Toronto's racialized communities. The analogy is patently absurd: none of Toronto's racialized communities is a foreign state, let alone one of the world's leading military powers.

South Africans familiar with conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories believe Israel is imposing apartheid in the West Bank. You heard some of their names in April. To name just two more:

- John Dugard, South African professor of international law, Judge on the International Court of Justice, and later the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories.
- South African MP Ronnie Kasrils, a long-time anti-apartheid activist whose Jewish grandparents moved to South Africa to escape Czarist pogroms in Latvia and Lithuania.

Decades ago, when I first learned about the Holocaust, the question that haunted me was "why didn't people speak up?"

In the 1930s and 40s, it was European Jews who were suffering. Today, it is the Palestinians. Five million of them, half the total, are refugees. Millions of others have been living under an increasingly harsh Israeli military occupation for 46 years. And those Palestinians who are citizens of Israel endure a decidedly second-class status there, as Israeli human rights groups have amply documented.

If Toronto Councillors do not care to raise your own voices against these injustices now—although you should—the very least that you can do is resist the call to silence those of us who do.