

May 12, 2016

The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau  
Minister of International Development  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6  
Email: Marie-Claude.Bibeau@international.gc.ca

Re: Canada's funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees

Dear Minister Bibeau,

We, the undersigned, wish to request that the Canadian government restore funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees. In your mandate letter as Minister of International Development, the Prime Minister has called you to focus "Canada's development assistance on helping the poorest and most vulnerable, and supporting fragile states." We believe that Palestinian refugees in the Middle East are among the world's most vulnerable populations, and sorely need the aid that Canada has historically provided.

Specifically, we ask the Canadian government to contribute at least \$35 million annually to UNRWA's core programmes, increasing over the coming years as necessary as per the need. We also ask Canada to be ready, as necessary, to contribute to UNRWA's emergency programmes as requested. Palestinian refugees are regularly caught in the crossfire of Middle East strife, and often require emergency funds as observed in recent years in Gaza, Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus, and elsewhere.

We believe that Canada has a historic responsibility to Palestinian refugees. Canada voted in favour of UNGA Resolution 181 in 1947 which partitioned Palestine and called for the creation of a majority Jewish state, and a majority Palestinian Arab state. Subsequent events led to at least 700,000 Palestinians losing their homes and becoming refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and other countries. As a result of this humanitarian crisis, UNRWA was mandated to provide services to these dispossessed Palestinians starting in 1950. Today the number of registered Palestinian refugees has swelled to over 5 million, and many refugee camps are located in, or near, areas of conflict. Given the historical and ethical context, Canada has a responsibility to help Palestinian refugees until their status is resolved.

As you are surely aware, Canada was a long-time consistent supporter of the humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees. For decades following the 1950s, Canada donated reliably to Palestinian refugees via UNRWA. Until 2009, Canada had been one of the top 20 contributors to UNRWA's core programs, giving about \$30 million per year.<sup>1</sup> Canada's support enabled greater stability and development within the Palestinian refugee population through UNRWA's programs in education, health care, microfinance and other services.

Michael Bell, former Canadian ambassador to Israel, the Palestinian territories, Egypt and Jordan has often applauded the impressive work and accomplishments of UNRWA. Referring to the work of UNRWA in Gaza on one occasion, Bell wrote, “[UNRWA] has ensured the welfare of generations of refugees. It employs 15,000 Palestinians directly in Gaza. These employees have an average family size of six in a territory with the world's highest unemployment rate, 70 per cent. Twenty per cent of UNRWA's employees deliver solid health care, at very modest cost. Fifty per cent of its employees in Gaza are teachers [...]”<sup>2</sup>

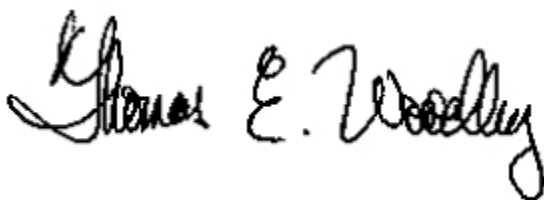
Despite its historical support for UNRWA, Canada faltered during the years of the Harper government. In 2009, Canada began decreasing the funding until, since 2013, Canada has given nothing.

With the election of a new government in 2015, Canada has a chance to renew its commitments and image internationally. In his mandate letter to you, Prime Minister Trudeau called for a different type of leadership in international development: leadership that consults with Canadian stakeholders and aid organizations to guide Canada's aid decisions to sustainable growth in the developing world. We can think of no better example of this than through a renewed commitment to UNRWA, and the developmental needs of Palestinian refugees.

As Canada's Global Affairs Website declares, Canada has long sought to play a prominent role with Palestinian refugees, including “through continuing to focus international attention on improving the situation of the more than [five] million Palestinian refugees.”<sup>3</sup> We encourage you, your ministry and your government to embody this ideal with a sustained humanitarian commitment of at least \$35 million annually to UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees.

With respect and good wishes,

(Signatures as of 11:00 a.m., May 12, 2016)



Thomas E. Woodley  
President, Canadians for Justice and Peace  
in the Middle East

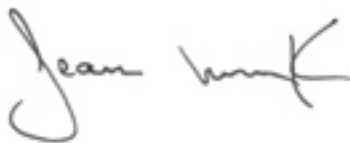


Jacques Létourneau  
President, Confédération des syndicats  
nationaux

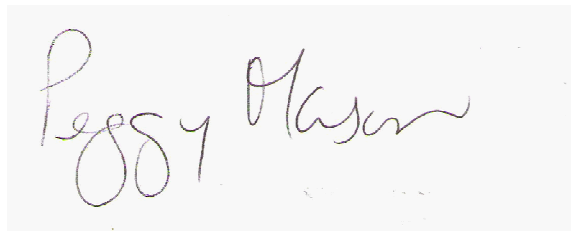


*Elizabeth Garant*

Elizabeth Garant  
Director General, Vivre Ensemble / Centre  
justice et foi



Jean Murdock  
Secretary General and Treasurer of the  
Fédération nationale des enseignantes et des  
enseignants du Québec (FNEEQ-CSN)



Peggy Mason  
President, Rideau Institute



Tyler Levitan  
Campaigns Coordinator, Independent  
Jewish Voices, Canada





Professor John Packer, Director: Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa

*Steve Berube,  
Marianna Harris*

Rev. Steve Berube & Rev. Marianna Harris  
Co-chairs, United Network for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel



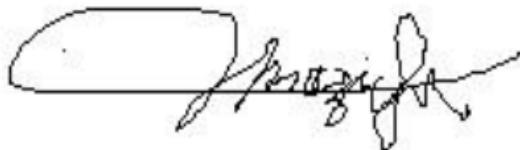
Roy Culpeper  
Chair, Group of 78



The Group of 78  
Le Groupe des 78

*Samer Majzoub*

Samer Majzoub  
President, Canadian Muslim Forum



Monia Mazigh  
National Coordinator, International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group





Michel Lambert  
Director General, Alternatives



Louise Chabot  
President, Centrale des syndicats du Québec

**Centrale des syndicats  
du Québec**



Dominique Daigneault  
President, Conseil central du Montréal  
métropolitain (CCMM-CSN)



Molly Kane  
Coordinator, L'Entraide missionnaire



***Nabil Abu-Thuraia***

Nabil Abu-Thuraia  
President, Palestinian Cultural Club of  
Montreal



## *Mike Palecek*

Mike Palecek  
National President, Canadian Union of Postal  
Workers (CUPW – STTP)



Pierre Jasmin  
Vice President, Artists for Peace



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<sup>1</sup> “Summary of Canada’s Contributions to UNRWA 2000-2011.” External Relations Department (UNRWA). 22 May 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Bell, Michael, “The only Palestinian relief agency that counts,” The Globe and Mail, May 20, 2009, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-only-palestinian-relief-agency-that-counts/article785777/> accessed May 8, 2016

<sup>3</sup> “Canadian Policy on Key Issues in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” Global Affairs Canada Website, [http://www.international.gc.ca/name-anmo/peace\\_process-processus\\_paix/canadian\\_policy-politique\\_canadienne.aspx?lang=eng#a05](http://www.international.gc.ca/name-anmo/peace_process-processus_paix/canadian_policy-politique_canadienne.aspx?lang=eng#a05) accessed May 8, 2016