



Training:

Do's and Don'ts in your meeting with your Local Political Representative

Training Document Series No. 5, Created: May 2019, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East

Over the months, we have realized that there are a number of things to do, or not do while addressing your concerns with your local political representative. The following are lists of the lessons accrued so far.

What you should DO

- Make a good first impression. Appearance shouldn't matter, but it does. Get off on the right foot by dressing appropriately and arriving on time.
- Tell the political representative what you want, and why you want it.
- Keep it simple. Think about what your political representative is interested in, what he/she is working on, what are his/her personal interests. No need to go through everything that is included in the presentation. Pick out the 2 or 3 points that are important to that politician and try to focus on those.
- Define the specific asks that you will advance. Make sure they are specific and reasonable.
- Secure a commitment. Once you've spelt out what you are asking for, seek a commitment from your political representative. Ask them what they are going to do as a result of your visit and when. Ask them to inform you when they have taken action.
- Be organized. Prepare an information package of handouts including a one-page summary of your main points in large print. Have enough handouts for participants in your group, the politician and his or her assistants. CJPME can provide a summary sheet based on its material, but you may want to customize or add to the list.
- Focus on facts, statistics, and credible sources. Sources with high credibility with your audience are: Reports from UN bodies; Reports from human rights organizations; Reports from relief organizations.
- Know your facts. Make your points based on international law and human rights. Be at least minimally familiar with international law instruments, and human rights instruments, to be able to mention them as the basis of your arguments.
- Be a good listener. In addition to how much your political representative understands about the issue, you also need to know what he/she thinks about it. This will help you to respond to any misconceptions or false information they may have.
- Always be polite, even if the discussion becomes intense. Be sincere and passionate without being too emotional.
- Create a relationship. This should not be a "one off" meeting. Position the meeting as the first of many that you hope to have with your political representative. At the end of the meeting, make sure you have items which are cause for additional meetings, contacts.
- Admit when you don't know something. No one expects you to know everything. If you're asked a question to which you don't know the answer, say something like, "I don't have that answer at my fingertips. Let me get back to you on that."

- Encourage the political representative to own up to his/her personal viewpoints, especially if the political representative plays the devil’s advocate. E.g. If the political representative says something like, “Many people believe that the Palestinians are the aggressors.” You respond by saying, “But what do you believe? Do you believe that the Palestinians are the aggressors?”
- Consider having some rhetorical questions ready if you know that the political representative is somewhat hostile to your position. Some of the rhetorical questions you could use which pertain to the Wall are:
 - Do you believe in the human rights of Palestinians?
 - Don’t you agree that international law takes precedence over the policies and laws of an individual nation, whether Israel, Canada or any other country?
 - Do you agree that Canadian policy should not favor one people over another?
 - Don’t you agree that human rights and international law should be respected, regardless of the progress of the peace plan?
 - Don’t you agree that even if a Wall is built, it must respect international law and human rights?
 - Don’t you agree that Canada should support the International Court of Justice?

What you should NOT Do

- Do not “argue the occupation,” or anything else not central to your point. CJPME tries to give its delegates positions and points which are easy to sell and back up. Be content to make the points on the agenda and leave other discussions for later.
- Do not let your political representative take you down “rabbit holes” (i.e. discussions which are peripheral to your focus, or which are just a question of personal opinion.) If the political representative wants to divert your focus, simply say, “I’d love to discuss this with you, but that is not the focus of our meeting today.”
- Do not cite rumor or hearsay. Also, avoid citing personal anecdotes unless they are extremely striking, and are central to your point.
- Do not cite or promote conspiracy theories. Such positions will tend to marginalize you and cause the political representative to dismiss the rest of what you say.
- Do not argue religious viewpoints. If the political representative brings up the question of religion, or God-given rights to the land, respond with a statement like, “Many people groups have varying religious positions, and they cannot be superimposed on people who do not share that religious viewpoint. Our arguments are based on international law and human rights.”
- Do not become argumentative. If you have made your point clearly, leave it at that. Your goal is not to make your politician agree with you, but to make sure your political representative has understood your point.
- Do not attack the Jewish people or faith. Our issues are with the Israeli government and its policies. There are many Jewish organizations and Jewish people who are very supportive of Palestinians, international law and human rights. The arguments for international law and human rights apply to Israel and its government.