



Canadians for Justice and Peace  
in the Middle East  
580 Sainte-Croix, Suite 050  
Saint-Laurent, QC H4L 3X5  
Jan. 6, 2021

Mr. Jagmeet Singh Dhaliwal, M.P.,  
Leader  
New Democratic Party of Canada  
NDP National Headquarters  
279 Laurier Avenue East – Suite #300  
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5J9

Dear Mr. Singh,

On behalf of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, and the other signatories on this letter, I write to commend the human rights concerns expressed by two New Democratic Party (NDP) Members of Parliament, Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins-James Bay) and Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre). By bringing attention to the issue of Israel's racially-discriminatory vaccination program Angus and Gazan follow in the NDP tradition of speaking out against racism and injustice at home and around the world.

It is regrettable, but like many other Israeli government practices and laws, Israel's vaccine rollout of recent weeks has many hallmarks of a racially-biased system – a type of “vaccine apartheid.” In perhaps the most shocking example of this, Israeli citizens living in illegal West Bank settlements have access to Israel's vaccination program, while neighboring Palestinians in the same territory have been excluded. As such, it is entirely appropriate that Mr. Angus used the term “apartheid state” in referring to Israel and its vaccination program. Ms. Gazan, citing the same reports, rightly accused Israel of “excluding people from being vaccinated based on discriminatory decisions and a clear violation of human rights.”

The comments of Angus and Gazan were based on journalistic reports about Israel's vaccination program, which accurately presented the facts on the ground and the measured legal assessment of many human rights groups. As you consider Angus' and Gazan's comments, here are some things to bear in mind:

- As the occupying power in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, Israel has a legal obligation to ensure that all civilians of the territory it administers receive appropriate medical services. This obligation can and should be carried out in conjunction with the Palestinian Authority (PA). [Article 56](#) of the Fourth Geneva Convention articulates this obligation stating:

“To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining, with the cooperation of national and local authorities, the medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory, with particular reference to the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics.”<sup>1</sup>

- Some may suggest that the 1993 [Oslo Accords](#) somehow supersede the Fourth Geneva Convention, but they are wrong. Although the PA does have some limited authority under the Oslo accords, [Article 47](#) of the Fourth Geneva Convention makes clear that Israel's



obligations as the occupying power are not undermined “by any agreement concluded between the authorities of the occupied territories and the Occupying Power.”<sup>2</sup>

Even if Oslo did supersede international law – which it does not – proponents of Israel tend to cite or dismiss the Oslo Accords as it suits their arguments. They are silent when Israel violates the Accords – e.g. [when it expands illegal settlements](#),<sup>3</sup> [withholds tax transfers](#),<sup>4</sup> etc. – but strident as it concerns the Palestinians’ responsibilities. The Accords were shunted aside in 2001 when Israel began re-invading the West Bank and Gaza and remain in a state of limbo today.

- The applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories has been repeatedly reasserted by the international community. In 2001, the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention [convened](#) to “reaffirm the applicability of the Convention to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and reiterate the need for full respect for the provisions of the said Convention in that Territory.”<sup>5</sup> On almost an [annual basis](#), the UN General Assembly also reaffirms the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to these territories.<sup>6</sup>
- Beyond Israel’s legal obligations toward the Palestinian civilians of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, there are huge ethical and moral issues with the way Israel has conducted its vaccine rollout. In an [interview with Democracy Now](#), Dr. Mustafa Barghouti of the Palestine Medical Relief Services made the following observations:<sup>7</sup>
  - While the COVID-19 infection rate in Israel is 4%, the COVID-19 infection rate among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is at 36%.
  - The World Health Organization and the Palestinian Authority asked Israel to provide vaccines for Palestinian health care workers, but Israel has refused.
  - Reports indicate that, to date, Israel has been vaccinating Israelis in Israeli prisons, but has not vaccinated a single Palestinian prisoner in Israeli prison. (In fact, Israel’s Public Security Minister Amir Ohana has [explicitly instructed](#) the Israel Prison Service not to vaccinate Palestinian prisoners, contradicting Health Ministry guidelines<sup>8</sup>).
- For decades, Israel has been illegally colonizing the West Bank and East Jerusalem. To date there are 600,000 Jewish-Israelis planted in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, among a population of almost 3 million Palestinians. As Israel delivers vaccines to its illegal colonists, its health teams are driving past literally millions of unvaccinated Palestinians.

For these reasons, many civil society and human rights voices have been calling on Israel to fulfil its legal obligations and ensure that quality vaccines are provided to Palestinians under Israeli occupation. These voices include, but are not limited to:

- [Amnesty International](#).<sup>9</sup>
- A [joint statement](#) signed by 10 Israeli, Palestinian, and international human rights organizations, including: Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel; Al Mezan Center for Human Rights; Amnesty International Israel; B’Tselem - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories; Gisha - Legal Center for Freedom of Movement; Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights; Medical Human Rights Network IFHHRO; MEDACT; Physicians for Human Rights Israel; and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights.<sup>10</sup>
- A [joint statement](#) signed by 200 rabbis, organized by Rabbis for Human Rights.<sup>11</sup>



- The American “pro-Israel, pro-Peace” group [J Street](#).<sup>12</sup>
- The editorial board of the Israeli newspaper *Ha’aretz*, with an [op-ed](#) titled “Vaccines for Both Peoples.”<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, a [statement](#) released today by Amnesty International declared that “Israel’s COVID-19 vaccine programme highlights the institutionalized discrimination that defines the Israeli government’s policy towards Palestinians.” The statement continues, “Over half a century of occupation and enforcement of a system of institutionalized discrimination in the OPT, including East Jerusalem, Israel has deprived Palestinians of their basic rights and committed mass human rights violations. Israel must end its discriminatory policies and remove any barriers that may hinder Palestinians from accessing or enjoying health care.”<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that the statements by Mr. Angus and Ms. Gazan are shared by a broad section of international civil society. And with such a scathing rebuke from Amnesty International, there can be no doubt that Israel’s vaccination accomplishments are sullied by its racist practices. There may be other countries that carry out racist practices in the distribution of vaccines, but Israel does it while claiming a place among liberal Western democracies. Israeli and Canadian officials talk of “shared values” between the two countries, and Israel enjoys a privileged trade agreement with Canada. Israel is answerable to the Fourth Geneva Convention because it is a signatory to the Convention.

Just as you, yourself and the NDP have decried Canada’s racist treatment of its indigenous population, we call upon you to follow the lead of Angus and Gazan and make your own statement condemning Israel’s racist administration of vaccines. Our elected representatives have a duty to publicize and stand against racism and injustice, whether in Canada or elsewhere.

The signatories to this letter speak for, and to, grassroots Canadians of all backgrounds. We know that the principled statements by Mr. Angus and Ms. Gazan are aligned with the views of a strong majority of Canadians. Public opinion polls conducted by EKOS in [2017](#)<sup>15</sup> and [2020](#)<sup>16</sup> make clear that Canadians are uncomfortable with Israel’s ongoing human rights abuses, and that they do not want Israel to get a pass for its human rights violations. If the NDP leadership were to amplify their concerns, it would support international human rights, while aligning itself with the Canadian electorate.

Should you have any questions, you can reach us at 438-380-5410. We will follow up with you to discuss this matter directly.

Sincerely,

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

Canada Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee  
Canadian Arab Institute  
Independent Jewish Voices Canada  
Just Peace Advocates / Mouvement pour une paix juste  
NDP Socialist Caucus Vegans for BDS

Palestinian Canadian Community Centre - Palestine House  
Palestinian Canadian Congress  
Peace Alliance Winnipeg  
Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'action socialiste  
Vegans for BDS  
Nadia Abu-Zahra, D. Phil. (Oxon), Associate Professor, U. of Ottawa  
Laurie E. Adkin, Ph.D., Professor, U. of Alberta  
Ilan Kapoor, Ph.D., Professor, York University, Toronto  
Atif Kubursi, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Economics, McMaster U.  
Peter Larson, Chair, Ottawa Forum on Israel Palestine  
Dimitri Lascaris, Former Candidate for Leader of Green Party of Canada

---

<sup>1</sup> “Hygiene and Public Health,” Article 56, Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/ART/380-600063?OpenDocument>

<sup>2</sup> “Inviolability of Rights,” Article 47, Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/WebART/380-600054?OpenDocument>

<sup>3</sup> Oslo II states clearly, “Neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations.” “Oslo II - The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement - English Text,” The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: An Interactive Database, Economic Cooperation Foundation, p. 21, [https://ecf.org.il/media\\_items/624](https://ecf.org.il/media_items/624)

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Mosse, William, “Israel’s Retaliatory Seizure of Tax: A War Crime to Punish Palestinian ICC Membership,” Al-Haq, 2015, [https://www.alhaq.org/cached\\_uploads/download/alhaq\\_files/publications/The.Unlawful.Seizure.of.Palestinian.Taxes.Report.pdf](https://www.alhaq.org/cached_uploads/download/alhaq_files/publications/The.Unlawful.Seizure.of.Palestinian.Taxes.Report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> “Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention: Declaration,” United Nations: The Question of Palestine, Dec. 5, 2001, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-199888/>

<sup>6</sup> In 2018, the UN General Assembly resolution was entitled, “Applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories” For full resolution, see: [https://www.cjpme.org/un\\_dashboard\\_applicability\\_geneva](https://www.cjpme.org/un_dashboard_applicability_geneva). For yearly voting, see [https://www.cjpme.org/un\\_dashboard](https://www.cjpme.org/un_dashboard).

<sup>7</sup> “‘Medical Apartheid’: Israeli Vaccine Drive Excludes Millions of Palestinians in Occupied Territories,” *Democracy Now*, Jan. 5, 2021, [https://www.democracynow.org/2021/1/5/israel\\_vaccines\\_palestinian\\_territories\\_mustafa\\_barghouti](https://www.democracynow.org/2021/1/5/israel_vaccines_palestinian_territories_mustafa_barghouti)

<sup>8</sup> John Breiner, “Israeli Minister Orders Not to Vaccinate Palestinian Security Prisoners, Despite COVID Directives,” *Haaretz*, Dec. 27, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.HIGHLIGHT-against-covid-directives-israeli-minister-orders-not-to-vaccinate-prisoners-1.9402652>

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, “Denying COVID-19 vaccines to Palestinians exposes Israel’s institutionalized discrimination,” January 6, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/01/denying-covid19-vaccines-to-palestinians-exposes-israels-institutionalized-discrimination/>

<sup>10</sup> “Joint Statement: 10 Israeli, Palestinian and international health and human rights organizations: Israel must provide necessary vaccines to Palestinian health care systems,” ReliefWeb (Press Release), December 23,



---

2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/joint-statement-10-israeli-palestinian-and-international>

<sup>11</sup> Jeremy Sharon, “200 rabbis call on Israel to make COVID vaccine available to Palestinians,” *Jerusalem Post*, January 5, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/health-science/200-rabbis-call-on-israel-to-make-covid-vaccine-available-to-palestinians-654356>

<sup>12</sup> J Street, “Israel’s impressive vaccination efforts are commendable; Israel also obligated to work with PA to ensure Palestinians in Occupied Territories receive vaccines,” January 5, 2021, <https://jstreet.org/press-releases/israels-impressive-vaccination-efforts-are-commendable-israel-also-obligated-to-work-with-pa-to-ensure-palestinians-in-occupied-territories-receive-vaccines>

<sup>13</sup> Editorial, “Vaccines for Both Peoples,” *Haaretz*, January 15, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/vaccines-for-both-peoples-1.9373052>

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International, “Denying COVID-19 vaccines to Palestinians exposes Israel’s institutionalized discrimination,” January 6, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/01/denying-covid19-vaccines-to-palestinians-exposes-israels-institutionalized-discrimination/>

<sup>15</sup> Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME). “2017 Survey: On Israel-Palestine, Canadian Government Is Out Of Touch.” EKOS poll co-sponsored with Independent Jewish Voices Canada, Dimitri Lascaris, and Murray Dobbin. 2017. Available online: <https://www.cjpme.org/survey>

<sup>16</sup> CJPME. “2020 Survey on Canadian Attitudes on Israel-Palestine.” EKOS poll co-sponsored with Independent Jewish Voices Canada and the United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine-Israel. 2020. Available online: <https://www.cjpme.org/survey2020>