

Complaint to Board of Directors of Cooperation Canada Concerning World Vision Canada

From: Thomas Woodley, Secretary, CJPME Foundation
Mousa Zeidan, National Coordinator, Canadian Palestinian Organizations Coalition

Date: December 10, 2020

To: Nicolas Moyer, Director and CEO, Cooperation Canada
Rachelle Daley, our Manager of Stakeholder Relations and Events, Cooperation Canada
Board Membership Committee of Cooperation Canada
Board of Directors of Cooperation Canada

We are writing on behalf of the CJPME Foundation and Canadian Palestinian Organizations Coalition (CPOC). The CJPME Foundation is a Canadian charity dedicated to helping Canadians better understand human rights and Indigenous rights in Canada and internationally. The CPOC is a group of 15 Palestinian-Canadian community associations from across Canada. We are writing to you because we believe that World Vision Canada (WVC), a member of Cooperation Canada (CC), has significantly violated CC's Code of Ethics.

In June of this year, WVC rejected a grant offer of \$165,000 from the CJPME Foundation for COVID-19 relief for Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT, i.e. the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza). The money had been raised by the CJPME Foundation in conjunction with the CPOC over the course of several months. By arbitrarily refusing this grant, we believe WVC has violated CC's code of ethics in three ways:

1. by its lack of transparency in its communications with the CJPME Foundation, the donor of this grant (as per items C2.2 and C2.3 of the CC Code of Ethics)
2. by its lack of accountability to its international partners affected by its decision (as per items C5.1 and C5.5 of the CC Code of Ethics), and
3. by its failure to act with fairness regarding the on-the-ground need for the offered grant (as per items C2.4, C4.4 and C4.12 of the CC Code of Ethics).

To be clear on the seriousness of the matter: World Vision Canada refused a grant of \$165,000 for emergency Coronavirus relief for Palestinians in the OPT in the middle of a global COVID-19 pandemic. While no charity is obliged to accept all grants, WVC has failed to do so in a way which is clear, consistent and justifiable, or respecting CC's Code of Ethics vis-à-vis donors, partners and social justice.

We consider WVC's violation of CC's code of ethics to be extremely worrying. Prior to launching an inquiry into WVC's actions, we would ask that the CC Board Membership Committee first schedule a face-to-face (i.e. video conference) session with the CJPME Foundation and the CPOC to discuss the substance of our complaint. If, following its inquiry, the CC Board Membership Committee concurs that WVC is in breach of CC's code of ethics, we ask that CC:

1. take appropriate measures to reprimand or sanction World Vision Canada as a member, and
2. communicate its decision to us.

Regardless of its decision, once CC has carried out its inquiry into the matter, we request that CC provide us a written summary of its findings.

Our complaint below is organized as follows:

- **Timeline of Complaint.** This section describes the events and discussions between the CJPME Foundation and its partners, and WVC prior to, and following WVC's rejection of the grant.
 - Part 1 – Initial Outreach
 - Part 2 – Trying to Get Answers
 - Part 3 – WVC Rejects Grant
 - Part 4 – WVC Violates its Supposed Freeze

The specifics of the first three parts of this section are supported by “ADDENDUM A: Record of Communications between CJPME Foundation & WVC” which accompanies this complaint. ADDENDUM A makes references to included .pdf files of all email exchanges, and transcripts (available upon request) of the majority of Zoom meeting conversations. Part 4 of this section is supported by “ADDENDUM B - Russell Lavis' Ultramarathon in Support of WVC's work in the OPT.” ADDENDUM B makes references to included .pdf files and discussions relevant to a second fundraising initiative relevant to this complaint.

All of the documents referenced above (including the addendums and their associated documents) can be accessed electronically at

http://www.cjpmefoundation.org/wvc_complaint_documents

- **Breaches of CC's Code of Ethics.** This section contains three subsections which describe in detail how WVC's behaviour violated CC's Code of Ethics:
 - Failure to Communicate Transparently with Donors
 - Failure to Treat International Partners as True Equals
 - Refusal to Act with Fairness
- **Failure to Uphold the International Red Cross Humanitarian Principle of “Impartiality.”** While not formally part of CC's Code of Ethics, we consider WVC to have violated the Red Cross humanitarian principle of “impartiality” – a key principle for any international development agency. We ask that CC also consider our serious concerns on this point.

Following email communications with Nicolas Moyer, Director and CEO of CC, we understand that the process of launching a formal complaint to CC about one of its members involves sending the complaint to Mr. Moyer, and to Ms. Daley, who will then submit the complaint to the CC Board Membership Committee.

We will point out that, as per Mr. Moyer's recommendation, our organizations have already reached out to World Vision Canada to address our concerns about their apparent ethical breaches. We had a one-hour Zoom discussion with Michael Messenger, CEO of World Vision, on Oct. 13, 2020. Unfortunately, Mr. Messenger was unable to assuage our concerns about the ethical breaches of his organization as alleged below. As such, we feel we have no choice but to address our concerns to you.

Timeline of Complaint

Part 1 – Initial Outreach

In late April of this year, in response to the global coronavirus pandemic, the CJPME Foundation and the Canadian Palestinian Organizations Coalition (CPOC) launched what we titled the "Palestine Medical Relief Campaign" (PMRC) to raise funds to procure emergency COVID-19 relief for Palestinians. When the campaign had finished, we were ready to gift \$165,000 to a humanitarian organization. To distribute the funds, the CJPME Foundation approached a number of respected humanitarian organizations, including World Vision Canada (WVC).

In response to our inquiry to WVC, Thomas Woodley was put in touch with Lindsay Gladding, Director, Fragile and Humanitarian Programs. In an email on April 27, Woodley explained that we were interested in donating the money to WVC "to help Palestinians during the Coronavirus crisis." Ms. Gladding emailed to Woodley on April 29, noting she was "definitely open" to discussing the "possibility of a partnership." We agreed to set up a Zoom call for May 4 between Woodley, Gladding, and another WVC staff person. During that Zoom call, on behalf of the PMRC, Woodley expressed our interest in providing a grant to fund medical equipment for COVID-19 relief. For her part, Gladding and her colleague expressed interest in a partnership, and said that they expected to hear back from field staff in Palestine-Israel in the "next few days" about their COVID-related needs. Gladding said she would get in touch once WVC understood the needs from the field.

On May 22, three weeks after the Zoom call and after two emails from Woodley requesting an update, we finally received a response from WVC. Gladding confirmed that WVC's partners on the ground had identified a need for additional resources:

"While the response plan is not ready yet, we were able to get some information on a call directly with our Operations Manager. **He confirms that there is scope for more assistance in the health sector through provision of health equipment.** They are currently partnering with the [Palestinian Ministry of Health] and distributing PPE and other materials **so if additional resources are available they could go towards this.** He was not so much in favor of medicine purchases and distributions but **any other materials would be useful.** I'm happy to continue to pursue more specific details if you think that would be helpful for your purposes as well." (Lindsay Gladding, May 22, email, emphasis added)

Woodley immediately responded very positively to this update, and expressed his desire to proceed, noting: “So this sounds like it might be a good fit,” and “if you’re able to provide more details, this would be great.” Woodley also made sure to keep all options open, adding that “if the response plan comes in, and if there’s a decent fit with things in that, we could look at that too.”

Part 2 – Trying to Get Answers

However, three weeks passed without any updates from WVC. On June 12 Woodley emailed Gladding to ask if she was “planning to provide more details, as you said in your last email?” Gladding responded on June 15, saying “I’m very sorry as it seemed we misunderstood each other.” She then posed to Woodley a number of questions about our expectations for a project, including what the total value of the grant would be, whether WVC’s usual administrative fee would be acceptable to CJPME Foundation, and our expectations for reporting on how the grant was spent. Gladding further apologized for the “delay in moving this forward.” Woodley replied positively the next day, and provided answers to Gladding’s questions: offering an update on the grant amount, accepting the WVC’s administrative overhead fee, and asking for very little in terms of reporting requirements.

One day later, Gladding acknowledged my email, and mentioned the expected next steps to move forward:

“Thanks very much for these clarifications – definitely helpful context for us to have. Given that we have not engaged in a partnership for some time with CJPME there are some administrative steps I need to go through here in order to move forward. In the meantime we will continue to engage with our field office to determine activities that would be appropriate given the context of your campaign ask (medical supplies to Palestinian health clinics). I hope to come back to you before the end of the week with further updates” (Lindsay Gladding, June 17, email).

One week later, on June 24, Gladding asked to set up a Zoom call “to discuss the funding proposal for Palestine.” We agreed to a call on Friday, June 26, and Woodley invited Mohamed Awad, a representative of the CPOC, to join us.

Part 3 – WVC Rejects Grant

On June 26, almost two months after our initial conversation with Gladding, Mohamed Awad and Woodley joined Gladding on the Zoom call she had organized. Gladding started the meeting directly with a simple message: WVC would not accept a grant from the CJPME Foundation for emergency COVID-19 relief for Palestinians. Very little explanation was given for the rejection, other than a vague allusion to Mohammed al-Halabi, a World Vision Australia

staff person in Gaza who was arrested on accusations of embezzlement by Israel in 2016.¹ Ms. Gladding indicated that the pending status of Mr. al-Halabi's case somehow prevented WVC from accepting a grant from us for COVID-19 relief in 2020 for Palestinians. Gladding was not able to describe a clear link between al-Halabi and the rejection of our grant, but she agreed to put the "reason" in an email within a week.

Gladding sent her follow-up email on July 7, but it provided no additional clarity for why the grant was refused. She simply wrote: "As we discussed, World Vision Canada is not in a position to engage in a partnership with the CJPME Foundation at this time."

Following this rejection, we arranged with Ms. Gladding to have a Zoom meeting with Michael Messenger, President of World Vision Canada. Because of Woodley's vacation schedule and Mr. Messenger's travel schedule, the Zoom call did not occur until October 13. The call involved Mr. Messenger and Julie McKinlay for WVC, Woodley for the CJPME Foundation, and Mr. Awad for the CPOC. During the call, even though we had sent Mr. Messenger questions and documentation several days in advance, Mr. Messenger was unable to provide any specific explanation as to how our grant offer was in any way dependent on the al-Halabi case.

Nevertheless, several notable revelations came from that meeting:

- Messenger claimed personal responsibility for the decision to reject the grant, noting more than once that the decision "came right up to my desk."
- No specific reason was provided to justify WVC's freeze on accepting funding for Palestinians. However, Messenger suggested that the region has become very challenging for World Vision since al-Halabi's arrest, and that the organization wanted to "keep a lower profile" in order to protect its core operations. While he repeatedly cited the "fraught" situation regarding WVC's work in the OPT, he stopped short of saying that WVC's continued work with Palestinians had been threatened by Israel.
- Messenger said that since the arrest of al-Halabi in 2016, WVC had imposed a "freeze" on accepting external grants for projects in Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza, apart from its core sponsorship program. He explained that WVC's current policy was to refrain from soliciting non-child-sponsorship donations, and to refuse any grant offers.
- Messenger apologized for the communication problems over the status of the grant, and said that there was no intention of stonewalling the CJPME Foundation. He claimed that the grant offer had caused many "active conversations" behind the scenes since this was the first time that this issue had come up since 2016, but that ultimately Messenger himself decided to reject the grant.
- When asked, Messenger admitted that WVC does not maintain a freeze on grants for any other area of the world, and that the freeze was a decision that WVC made independently of other World Vision organizations around the world. He admitted that

¹ Mohammed al-Halabi was arrested by Israel in 2016, and the investigation against him is ongoing. For more than 50 days he was detained without access to a lawyer, before finally being charged with embezzling money to Hamas. His case was investigated by World Vision and the Australian government, neither of which found any evidence for the charges against him. Sophie McNeill, "No evidence of diversion of World Vision funds to Hamas, DFAT says," ABC News (Australia), March 21, 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-21/no-evidence-world-vision-funds-diverted-to-hamas-dfat-says/8374078>

even though WVC was refusing grants in the OPT, that World Vision Germany had delivered two grants to the OPT successfully since 2016.

- Messenger claimed that the World Vision team in Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza were consulted on this matter, but Messenger seemed to avoid answering questions about whether they, or any other partners on the ground, had instructed WVC to reject the CJPME Foundation grant.

Part 4 – WVC Violates its Supposed Freeze

To our surprise, on Saturday, October 31, just weeks after our Zoom meeting with Messenger, we learned about an ultra-marathon runner, Russell Lavis, who had organized a fundraiser to “support World Vision Canada in their work to protect in West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem.” Ultimately, once the event was complete, Mr. Lavis had raised almost \$10,000 for WVC. While we were happy to see fundraising to support Palestinians, we were confused as this event seemed to contradict the supposed “freeze” on external, non-sponsorship grants that Messenger had so adamantly defended just weeks earlier. And while it might be easy to attribute this inconsistency to poor internal communications within WVC, Michael Messenger himself commented on the Team World Vision Canada Facebook page on Nov. 7 at 7:38 a.m. to say, “Go Russell!!”

We reached out to the ultramarathon benefactor to WVC and subsequently learned:

- The fundraiser was initiated by Mr. Lavis in full cooperation with, and fully supported by WVC. WVC made several social media posts about Mr. Lavis and his fundraiser.
- WVC provided Mr. Lavis with the exact text about how the grant funds would be used. The text provided on his fundraising grant Webpage was as follows:
 - “Facilitating sessions that help respond to the needs of mothers and their children
 - Establishing child friendly environments to promote early childhood development in clinics, and provide safe play areas with protection measurements
 - Conducting individual home visits for mothers who can’t access clinics to support their learning and adoption of key practices
 - Providing sessions on inclusive education for parents and teachers in areas where students with disabilities are not well integrated in classrooms
 - Empowering community members to advocate for improved systems and structures. Conduct PSS extracurricular related activities at school”
- The period of time between initiating the grant discussions and its completion was very short. Lavis had introduced the idea to WVC in September, and had finalized all the arrangements with WVC on Oct. 22, just nine days after Messenger had asserted to us that WVC had a freeze in place. The event took place early November.

This means that this fundraiser was being discussed at the exact same time as the CJPME Foundation’s grant was being rejected by Messenger, ostensibly on the basis of a policy not to accept any external grant funding for WVC’s work in the OPT.

Breaches of Code of Ethics

We suggest to you that WVC has breached the following principles of Cooperation Canada's Code of Ethics.

a. Failure to Communicate Transparently with Donors

First, in its dealings with the CJPME Foundation, WVC breached principles C2.3 on Transparency and C2.2 on Accountability. CC's Code of Ethics dictates:

- "C2.3 Transparency – Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations should communicate freely and accurately with their partners, donors, the public and each other"
- "C2.2 Accountability – Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations should be accountable to their international partners, to their staff, to their donors, to the Canadian public and to each other for their contributions to international cooperation and their stewardship of resources."

Contradictory Actions and Explanations

Perhaps the most mystifying aspect of our experience with WVC was the handling of the supposed "freeze" on grant funding to WVC's work in the OPT. If indeed, since 2016, there had been a "freeze," why didn't Ms. Gladding communicate this in the very initial conversations in April.

Also, if there were such a freeze, why was Mr. Lavis' ultramarathon project accepted at virtually the very same time that Mr. Messenger was explaining the refusal of our grant because of a supposed "freeze." WVC cannot make the argument that Mr. Lavis' project somehow slipped under the radar, since Mr. Lavis' fundraiser and run were covered by several posts on the Team World Vision Canada Facebook page, and since Michael Messenger himself posted a comment of encouragement on the page.

Unsatisfying Explanations

Apart from the bewildering situation around the supposed freeze, WVC never provided a satisfactory explanation for why the supposed freeze on grants was even necessary. First, we were promised by Gladding that we would receive an email detailing the specific reason for the rejection, but when the email arrived it did not include any further explanation. Second, although the WVC CEO did agree to meet with us to discuss this matter, Messenger's explanation at that meeting continued to be vague, even though we had provided Messenger with detailed questions and documentation several days ahead of time. We still do not know why al-Halabi's name was raised by WVC in this context, as they did not establish any causal link between his case and the decision to reject the grant. By all appearances, Al-Halabi's case

seems unrelated to WVC's decision to accept/reject grants, especially given WVC's acceptance of Mr. Lavis' grant.

Moreover, despite the many delays, WVC's ultimate rejection of the grant was inconsistent with the indications they had previously given us. For two months, we were receiving positive indications that WVC was interested in working with us, and even that staff in the region had identified material needs where our grant could be put to use. This is inexplicable if there was indeed a policy in place to "freeze" all external funding to the region.

Finally, it is notable that in the last substantive communication from Gladding prior to the rejection of the grant, she gave an indication that the identity of the CJPME Foundation might itself be an issue for WVC, writing: "Given that we have not engaged in a partnership for some time with CJPME there are some administrative steps I need to go through here in order to move forward" (email, June 17). This was odd, considering that the CJPME Foundation is a Canadian charity in good standing. In the Oct. 13 call with Mr. Messenger, he chalked the delays and the mysterious "administrative steps" text to the fact that, behind the scenes, WVC was still figuring out what to do.

Unexplainable Delays

Apart from other issues, our engagement with WVC about a possible partnership was plagued by problems of lengthy delays and communications problems. Twice, we waited three weeks for Ms. Gladding to respond to our very eager and simple inquiries. And ultimately, after two months, our efforts ended in the surprise reversal of WVC's initially receptive stance and the rejection of our grant.

Our experience with WVC was unlike any of our experiences with the four other international development organizations that we contacted.

- Two of these organizations were Canadian charities with work with the Palestinians:
 - **Oxfam-Quebec** was extremely responsive to our inquiries as to what emergency COVID-19 relief projects might be feasible. We had a high-level proposal within about a week after we first contacted Oxfam-Quebec, and were able to have a Zoom call with people "on-the-ground" a few days after that.
 - **The International Development Relief Foundation (IDRF)** was also extremely responsive to our inquiries on possible COVID-19 relief projects. Within less than a week, the IDRF had provided us a high-level proposal for a project to make use of our grant funds.
- Two of these organizations were international aid agencies who work with the Palestinians:
 - The **UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)** was very responsive, and we were able to speak to an overseas representative within days of our first contact.
 - The **World Health Organization (WHO)** was also very responsive, and we were in touch with a doctor in Jerusalem within days of reaching out to the WHO.

During a worldwide emergency, comparable development organizations responded promptly to our inquiries. WVC itself responded quite rapidly to Mr. Lavis' grant offer for its work in the OPT. As such, WVC's delays in answering our inquiries, retrieving answers to our questions, and considering our grant remain puzzling. Ultimately, the CJPME Foundation wasted a great deal of time with WVC – time that could have been more effectively spent working with other organizations more serious about getting COVID-19 aid to those who needed it.

Summary of Transparency and Accountability Issues

Given the urgency of the COVID-19 crisis, we consider such mixed/false messages and delays unconscionable. As per item "C2.2 Transparency," we DO NOT consider that WVC communicated with us accurately or transparently. Given the contradictions between their explanations and their actions, there is still much for WVC to explain. To all appearances, especially given Mr. Lavis' ultramarathon fundraiser, the explanation of a "freeze" on grants to the OPT was a *false* explanation given *only* to the CJPME Foundation. At best, WVC's dithering for two months before it decided it had a "freeze" in place on grants to the OPT is also reflective of a failure to communicate "accurately" or transparently with a donor, the CJPME Foundation and its partners.

Such behaviour is also in violation of the CC Code of Ethics item "C2.2 Accountability." In good conscience, the CJPME Foundation approached WVC with a significant grant to meet an emergency need. Yet for two months, we met inexplicable delays, were falsely told that "administrative steps" had to be conducted, and were seemingly falsely told that a "freeze" on external grants for the OPT was in place. In this way, we consider that WVC acted in bad faith, and was unaccountable to us, a donor, in its behaviour. We consider likewise that WVC was unaccountable to the Canadian public – the hundreds of individuals donors who contributed to the PMRC – in the inconsistent way they treated two comparable donors: a flat rejection for the CJPME Foundation's offer of a grant; and an open embrace to Mr. Lavis' offer of a grant.

b. Failure to Treat International Partners as True Equals / Failure to Be Accountable to International Partners

Second, by overriding local needs which had been identified by those on the ground, WVC violated principles C5.1 and C5.1 about partnerships:

- "C5.1 Partnerships should be vehicles for long-term accompaniment that support the right of peoples to determine and carry out activities that further their own options, through their civil society organizations;"
- "C5.5 Partnerships should embody equity. Acknowledging that inequalities often exist as a result of power dynamics, especially in funding relations, partners should strive for equitable partnerships."

WVC's local partners had identified material needs which the prospective grant from CJPME Foundation could satisfy, as WVC confirmed to CJPME Foundation in an email on May 22. In

that email, WVC wrote that their Operations manager had confirmed that “there is scope for more assistance in the health sector through provision of health equipment,” and that “any other materials [other than medicines] would be useful.” It was noted, for example, that grant resources could “go towards” WVC’s partnership with the Palestinian Authority’s Ministry of Health to distribute “PPE [personal protective equipment] and other materials.”

We also know that it was not WVC’s local staff or partners who made the decision to reject the CJPME Foundation’s grant, as Messenger made it clear on Oct. 13 that he was ultimately responsible for the decision. While he did suggest vaguely that this decision was done in consultation with a broader international team, he repeatedly avoided mentioning who had been involved in those discussions, in what capacity, or to what extent they had any influence over the decision. Neither did he indicate that local staff or other partners had advised WVC to reject the grant, despite being directly questioned on this on Oct. 13.

In this way, WVC’s unilateral decision to deny COVID funding for Palestinians denied their international partners the ability to “determine [...] activities that further their own options” (C5.1) and failed to respect their local needs. It is, after all, those in Palestine who would be most affected by a decision to reject resources for health equipment. WVC’s decision reveals an indifference to “equitable partnerships” (C5.5) between the WVC office and those who are implementing WVC programs on the ground, who were not able to take charge of this decision despite being affected by the outcome.

This failure to respond to local needs is a gravely serious issue, as the crisis caused by COVID-19 has been particularly severe in Palestine. The Palestinian Authority’s ability to manage the crisis has been limited not only by Israel’s military occupation of its territories, but also due to Israel’s withholding of tax revenues.² Additionally, UNRWA, the UN agency responsible for Palestine refugees with a huge portion of its budget dedicated to health care, currently faces a catastrophic financial shortfall and operational challenges.³

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTD) has determined that the COVID crisis has “compounded the dire economic conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt), which were moving from bad to worse before the pandemic.”⁴ Particularly troubling is a study of Gaza workers conducted by Islamic Relief in September 2020, which found that monthly income in Gaza had fallen by almost 90% since the start of COVID, that 60% of people could not afford basic food and essential supplies, and that 82% suffered from mental health issues, concluding that the “double lockdown” of Covid-19 combined with the

² Reuters, “Palestinians slash public wages in tax dispute with Israel over annexation,” July 2, 2020, <https://ca.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2431BI>

³ Al Jazeera, “UN agency for Palestinians to slash salaries as funds run dry,” November 9, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/9/un-agency-for-palestinians-may-cut-salaries-amid-cash-crunch>

⁴ UNCTAD, “COVID-19 devastates Palestine’s shattered economy,” September 8, 2020, <https://unctad.org/news/covid-19-devastates-palestines-shattered-economy>

international blockade of the territory had pushed families “deeper into hunger, destitution and psychological harm.”⁵

In the context of this humanitarian disaster, it is appalling that WVC would turn down \$165,000 for COVID relief after their own staff had confirmed that it would be welcome and useful. This demonstrates neither respect for autonomy nor equity in WVC’s partnerships, but violates both.

c. Refusal to Act with Fairness

Third, in its refusal to accept grants for Palestinians, despite a COVID pandemic and the strains on the Palestinian health system, WVC violated principles C2.4, C4.4 and C4.12:

- C2.4 Fairness – Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations should practise and promote equity and justice in all their activities;
- C4.4 Promote social justice through the equitable distribution of power, wealth and access to resource;
- C4.12 Recognize the hazards of militarism and promote peaceful solutions to international, national or local conflict.

Since 1967, Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza have been living under a hostile military occupation, and ultimately, a situation of profound injustice and inequality. In his explanations to the CJPME Foundation on Oct. 13, Mr. Messenger implied that pressures related to Israel may have influenced the decision to reject the CJPME Foundation’s grant, although he did not offer a direct causal link.

Certainly, WVC is operating in an environment plagued by political pressures from Israel’s military occupation,⁶ and will to a degree suffer from those pressures. For example, in Nov. 2019, Israel expelled the local director of Human Rights Watch.⁷ Israel’s actions to sideline and punish humanitarian efforts and human rights advocates must contribute to feelings of intense insecurity among the NGOs working in the region. WVC’s references to the arrest of al-Halabi, a World Vision employee, suggest that they indeed recognized these challenges. Indeed, these are some of the “hazards of militarism” (C4.12) which CC members are expected to recognize in their work.

However, the existence of these pressures lead to the conclusion that Palestinians deserve *more* support from the international community, not less. In this deeply unfair and unequal

⁵ Islamic Relief, “New study shows shocking economic and psychological toll of Covid-19 in Gaza,” November 11, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/new-study-shows-shocking-economic-and-psychological-toll-covid>

⁶ “Imprisoned by the Occupation,” Amnesty International, May 14, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.ca/blog/imprisoned-occupation-0>

⁷ Holmes, Oliver, “‘Israel is joining an ugly club,’ says rights group as director expelled,” November 25, 2019, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/25/israel-expels-director-of-human-rights-watch-for-supporting-boycott>

political environment, WVC's decision to reject external grants, and specifically COVID relief, only compounds these injustices. This is particularly true considering the severe strains on the Palestinian health system due to COVID, as discussed above. Far from helping to "promote social justice" and provide "access to resources" (C4.4), this decision does the opposite, and in fact contributes to the growing lack of "equity and justice" (C2.4) faced by Palestinians under the Israeli occupation.

So while WVC should actually be trying to expand funding of its programs in the OPT, Messenger suggests that WVC has a multi-year blanket freeze on grants. According to Messenger, not only is WVC "not seeking" grants for its work with the Palestinians, but it is also *refusing* unsolicited grants.

If WVC's policy is to respond to political pressure by choosing to back away from providing humanitarian relief to those in need, then it amounts to discriminating against Palestinian civilians for a situation beyond their control.

International development work is never easy, and even less so under a military occupation. Yet by refusing a golden opportunity to provide additional emergency COVID-19 relief to Palestinians, WVC has tragically betrayed the CC principles of fairness (C2.4), social justice (C4.4) and opposition to militarism (C4.12.)

Failure to Uphold the International Red Cross Humanitarian Principle of "Impartiality"

Fourth and finally, we want to draw your attention to the Humanitarian Principles of the Red Cross, and in particular the principle of Impartiality:

Impartiality - It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavors to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.⁸

We note that CC's Code of Ethics does not reference the Humanitarian Principles of the Red Cross. Nonetheless, for international development organizations, they are an important measure for evaluating humanitarian ethics, and we suggest that they be taken seriously and considered in this case.

On Oct. 13, when Messenger suggested that WVC wanted to "keep a lower profile" to protect WVC's regular operations, as well as the references to the arrest of al-Halabi and WVC's relationship with the state of Israel, the implication of these comments was that WVC's decision was made based, at least in part, on political considerations. However, as interpreted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), "Impartiality means that ... **the only priority that can be set in dealing with those who require help must be based**

⁸ Red Cross Fundamental Principles, <https://www.redcross.ca/about-us/about-the-canadian-red-cross/red-cross-fundamental-principles>

on need, and the order in which available aid is shared out must correspond to the urgency of the distress it is intended to relieve.”⁹ (emphasis added) In WVC’s case, however, the expressed need for COVID relief, which was confirmed by WV staff on the ground, was subordinated to other priorities.

Second, WVC violates the principle of impartiality by discriminating against Palestinians in their decision to deny external funding only for WVC’s operations in Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza. As noted above, WVC does not have a freeze imposed on any other region or area, but has imposed this policy on the Palestinians alone. This freeze is in spite of the severe humanitarian pressures that Palestinians face, which make them no less deserving of assistance. In the absence of a satisfactory rationale, this freeze also appears to be arbitrary.

The CJPME Foundation raised the principle of impartiality in discussions with WVC, but Gladding seemed to suggest that impartiality only applies to an organization’s *existing* operational funding, and that it does not apply to the decision to accept or refuse additional funding (see Addendum A.) Messenger’s explanation on Oct. 13 took a similar tack, saying, “If accepting or rejecting funds somehow were to undermine our operational work, there could potentially be [...] concern that we breached humanitarian principles.” We disagree with this interpretation, believing that the act of arbitrarily refusing a grant is just as aberrant as playing favourites with the humanitarian funding that an organization already has.

In the end, WVC turned down a grant of \$165,000 for COVID relief supposedly on the basis of a high-level, made-in-Canada decision to deny all grant aid to Palestinians, motivated by unclear concerns. International development work is hard and involves difficult choices. But when an organization sacrifices the most fundamental principles of humanitarian aid in order to preserve some compromised version of itself, there is need for some serious organizational introspection.

Concluding Thoughts

The CJPME Foundation and the CPOC considered WVC a possible partner for this humanitarian project, in part due to previous experiences working with Dave Toycen, the previous CEO of WVC, and his team. In 2002, Mr. Woodley of the CJPME Foundation was involved in a Montreal-based organization (Sowers of Hope) which worked with WVC to provide a \$100,000 grant for a medical centre near Hebron in the West Bank. Two years later, Mr. Woodley and Sowers of Hope did another project with WVC to raise \$100,000 for an agricultural project for the Palestinian town of Nahhalin. The first of these projects was launched just months after the tumultuous events of the fall of 2001. At the time, the Camp David summit between Ehud Barak and Bill Clinton had just failed, and Ariel Sharon’s had made his provocative visit to the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, triggering demonstrations and a massive Palestinian resistance movement. We suggest that 2020 is no more fraught for aid agencies in the OPT than 2002 was.

⁹ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), “Impartiality,” <https://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/vision-and-mission/the-seven-fundamental-principles/impartiality/>

As laid out above, our experiences with WVC of the past few months leave many questions unanswered. Why did WVC accept Mr. Lavis' grant and refuse our grant? We're not going to speculate. Is there an unspoken reason? WVC's contradictory explanations and actions leave us puzzled and confused.

Despite the events detailed in this complaint, WVC is a respected organization and we approached them in good faith with high hopes. We say this to emphasize that the goal of this complaint is not to discredit an organization that generally does worthy humanitarian work, but simply to hold it accountable to the policies and practices to which it has subscribed – and to which its donors assume it lives up to. Given our recent experiences, WVC's reputation in our minds has been greatly diminished. Worse, we believe that the attitudes reflected in these recent interactions are causing harm to the people most in need of WVC's help. Our hope is that this incident will prompt WVC to review its operating principles and philosophies, and result in a stronger organization that fully respects and fully embodies the principles laid out in CC's Code of Ethics.

(See complaint cover letter for signatures)