

POSITION PAPER: THE POLITICALLY IMPOSED HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN GAZA



Policy Recommendations for Canada

- A. Canada must demand an immediate stop to all Israeli collective punishment. Collective punishment such as attacks on electricity and water supplies, withholding of fuel, construction materials and essential infrastructure needs as well as border closures have led to an appalling humanitarian crisis in Gaza. That crisis has been marked by hunger, even greater unemployment, a health service and educational crisis, serious food shortages and the threat of epidemics.
- B. Canada should call on both Israel and Palestinian militants to respect international humanitarian law. Targeting of civilians by any warring party is strictly forbidden under international law. Israeli air strikes and artillery shelling of Palestinian homes and border towns must stop, as must the launching of rockets and mortars against Israeli border towns and attacks on border crossings by Palestinian militants.
- C. Canada must continue to provide humanitarian and other assistance to Palestinians. We welcome Canada's constructive emergency responses in 2007, as called for by CJPME. These included a contribution of \$8 million for emergency relief through the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM) and the provision of \$10 million in response to UNRWA's 2007 emergency appeal as well as continued assistance through the Red Cross. CJPME also welcomes the Government's pledge of \$300 million over the next five years to build security, governance and prosperity in the Palestinian territories. But CJPME is very concerned that restrictions on that assistance may limit the flow of development assistance to Gaza where it is desperately needed.
- D. Canada must distance itself from the failed Bush Administration approach to Hamas. The Government must recognize that Hamas is not a monolithic organization but a Palestinian national religious/political movement including people of many views, as well as a militant wing. Hamas will have to be an integral part of any Israeli-Palestinian political settlement. In particular Canada must abjure ill-conceived measures such as the Bush Administration attempt to undermine Hamas by encouraging Fatah-Hamas conflict in Gaza.

A: Canada must call for a stop to Israeli collective punishment

1. Canada must call on Israel to stop meting out collective punishment. Collective punishment is described as punishment of a group of people for the actions of a few. Israel's limitations on the entry of people and goods into Gaza are placing unbearable strains upon the civilian population. For example, during April limitations on the entry of gasoline and diesel fuel brought transportation to a virtual halt, strained the ability of ambulances to respond to emergencies, and forced UNRWA to call a three day halt to distribution of food to 650,000 refugees. Vital public services have been crippled with no solid waste collection, raw sewage overflowing into residential areas and the supply of potable water severely limited because of the lack of diesel fuel to run pumps. The lack of diesel has impacted doctors' commutes to hospitals and the ability of teachers and students to reach schools. Additionally, crops are not being irrigated, while cooking gas shortages have forced almost half of Gaza's 47 bakeries to shut down operations.
2. Canada must call for a halt to Israel's highly disproportionate use of force. In April Israeli incursions into Gaza occurred almost every day leading to 70 civilian deaths including 21 children. The UN Secretary General condemned the loss of civilian life in Gaza and reminded Israel of "its responsibility to protect civilians under international humanitarian law during its military operations."

B: Canada Must Insist that Warring Parties Respect International Law

1. Respect for "law in war" cannot be dismissed with self-justifying reasons. In war all parties presume to hold the moral high ground. International humanitarian law makes no judgment on which side is

right or wrong. It simply sets limits to the brutality and civilian death and damage tolerated in war. This applies regardless of questions of “who started it” or “who is wrong” and similar accusations. Under international law (e.g. the Fourth Geneva Convention) there is no justification for the reckless killing of civilians, collective punishment or the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

2. Canada must hold equal expectations of Hamas and Israel. Hamas must recognize Israel, renounce violence, and respect previous accords. In the same way Israel must respect the territorial integrity of Gaza, renounce artillery strikes, aerial bombardment as well as assassinations and other violence imposed on Gaza.

C: Canada must provide humanitarian aid to Palestinians

1. Canada’s December 17th pledge of \$300 million over the next five years to build security, governance and prosperity in the Palestinian territories is welcome. But restrictions on that aid, including making it conditional on sustained progress in the peace process and Palestinian reforms as well as a determination to ensure that Canadian funds do not directly or indirectly benefit Hamas could inhibit the flow of development funds to Gaza.
2. CJPME anticipates that Canada will continue to respond to international appeals for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians and that such Canadian assistance will continue to flow to Gaza. But the pressing long term needs of Gaza’s population can only be met through economic development. CJPME believes, therefore, that the Government must ensure creative ways are found such as working through the UNDP, the World Bank or responsible NGOs to facilitate the flow of Canadian development assistance to Gaza.

D: Canada must engage with Hamas

1. Canada must stop isolating Hamas and encourage it to evolve its positions and abjure violence. Hamas is not a monolithic organization. It is also a religious and social organization that has deep roots among the Palestinian people. Hamas devotes much of its estimated \$70 million or more annual budget to an extensive social services network. It funds schools, orphanages, mosques, healthcare clinics, soup kitchens, and sports leagues. Approximately 90 percent of Hamas’ work is in social, welfare, cultural, and educational activities, according to Israeli scholar Reuven Paz.
2. Canada must recognize that there are significant differences between the external leadership of Hamas located in Damascus and the internal leadership in Gaza. There are members of Hamas who support a two state solution and members who do not. Canada’s goal should be to strengthen the hand of the moderates within Hamas, especially those in the internal leadership who tend to be more pragmatic than hardliners in Damascus. Canada, despite pressure to declare the PLO a terrorist organization never did so and consequently was able to maintain contacts and moderating influence with that group in the years proceeding Israel’s recognition of the PLO.
3. Canada must distance itself from the Bush position toward Hamas. Last year’s attempted American sponsored coup against Hamas in Gaza not only backfired, leading to a Hamas takeover there but it also appears that the influence of Hamas in the West Bank is growing. It ill behooves Canada to lock itself into positions it will have to reverse when, as seems inevitable, Israel’s leadership accepts that it has no option but to deal politically with Hamas and indeed is currently negotiating with Hamas indirectly.

For more Information...

For more information and background on Canadian foreign policy in the Middle East, the international siege of Gaza , and related topics, please consult the CJPME Website at <http://www.cjpme.ca> or contact CJPME at (514) 745-8491.