

CJPME's Written Submission

to the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism (CPCCA)

Concerning

Anti-Semitism in Canada

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East



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Canadian Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Semitism
Canadian Parliamentary Committee for Combating Anti-Semitism
Room 440C
Centre Block
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A6

Re: Call for written submissions to the Canadian Parliamentary Committee for Combating Anti-Semitism (CPCCA) inquiry into anti-Semitism in Canada.

Intro: Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME)

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) was established in 2002 by Canadians who want to foster justice, peace, prosperity and security for all peoples of the Middle East. CJPME's mission is to enable Canadians of all backgrounds to promote justice, development and peace in the Middle East, and here at home in Canada. CJPME is a pan-Canadian organization, with several established branches in Quebec and Ontario, and with close to 16,000 adherents in all provinces and territories. CJPME's constituency is ethnically diverse: it has members and adherents from all faith backgrounds – including Jewish; and from dozens of different national origins.

CJPME pursues activities which seek to inform and engage Canadians to better understand the dynamics in the Middle East. Although CJPME's purview encompasses all of the Middle East, it focuses much of its attention on the Israel-Palestine conflict for two reasons: 1) the Israel-Palestine conflict has dozens of different facets which contribute strongly to the ongoing dynamics and instability of the entire region, and 2) CJPME's leaders have tended to be most experienced and knowledgeable on this conflict. CJPME has been welcomed again and again in diverse meetings with high school and university students, unions, elected representatives, religious leaders, community groups, and similar such individuals and groups. CJPME has never been accused of anti-Semitism.

CJPME's Principles

Since its founding, CJPME has operated from a set of three core principles which determine all of its principles and positions on the Middle East: the belief that all positions should respect international law; the belief that violence is not a solution; and the belief that all parties in a conflict must be held to the same standard.

CJPME Opposes Anti-Semitism

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition (2009) defines anti-Semitism as "1. Hostility toward or prejudice against Jews or Judaism. 2. Discrimination against Jews." CJPME is categorically opposed to anti-Semitism in all of its forms.

Criticism of Israel must not be linked to Anti-Semitism

While CJPME is very supportive of attempts to eradicate anti-Semitism (and all other manifestations of hate and discrimination in the world), CJPME strongly disagrees with the CPCCA's attempt to link criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Criticism of Israel must not be linked to anti-Semitism for the following reasons:

There is no way to define “politically correct” criticism of Israel in a way to respect civil liberties

The CPCCA and its references makes sweeping claims and self-serving generalizations in linking anti-Semitism to criticism of Israel. The CPCCA quotes the “London Declaration for Combating Anti-Semitism,” stating: “We are alarmed at the resurrection of the old language of prejudice and *its modern manifestations* - in rhetoric *and political action* - against Jews, Jewish belief and practice and *the State of Israel.*” (italics added) The London Declaration goes on to say that “[Signatories] shall expose, challenge, and isolate political actors who engage in hate against Jews and *target the State of Israel as a Jewish collectivity.*” (italics added) While saying that it does not seek to stifle dissent towards the activities of the Israeli government, the CPCCA takes the London Declaration further, describing criticism of Israel as being a “new anti-Semitism” in Canada.

Both the London Declaration and the CPCCA statements are broad, vague, and provide no promise that a “politically correct” or practicable way of criticizing the acts of the Israeli government can ever be defined. Thus, conversely, CJPME fears that any attempt to define “anti-Semitic criticism of Israel” will result in 1) a terrifying attack on civil liberties of expression in Canada, and 2) a total silencing of debate on Israel out of fear of legal action. In addition to many other concerns, both of these two outcomes would violate fundamental protections enumerated in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Israel cannot be appropriately used as a proxy for Judaism/Jewry

Israel functions as a secular state. Its leaders are geo-political leaders, not religious leaders. Israeli government leaders are elected by (and represent) the citizens of Israel – some of them Jewish, some of them Muslim, some of them Christian. When Israeli government spokespeople speak, they do not purport to represent the world Jewish community. Large numbers of Jews in Israel, Canada and elsewhere are extremely critical of Israeli government policy, and actively assert their opposition to certain of its policies. In its declaration of independence, Israel defines itself as a “Jewish and democratic state.” This puts it in a class with other states which choose to define themselves religiously: Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Mauritania, etc. Nevertheless, this does not make the state of Israel the proxy for Judaism any more than Iran or Afghanistan and/or their leaders or policies are a proxy for Islam.

As Ryerson Social Justice and Democracy Professor Judy Rebick writes, trying to equate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism “is based on a claim that the State of Israel is the single outcome of the history of the Jewish people, the final end of generations of diasporic existence. It attempts to make the Zionist project of a Jewish nation the only legitimate project for all Jews.”

Critics of the State of Israel are not the enemies of the Jewish people

Many of the most vocal and effective critics of the Israeli government policy are Israelis and/or Jews themselves. Obviously, such individuals criticize Israeli policies not out of racial enmity, but out of a love for what the state of Israel could and should be in the Middle East. More broadly, many who criticize violent and oppressive Israeli policies (including CJPME) do so because they feel that such policies – and lack of justifiable criticism of them – have prevented Israel from enjoying true and stable peace with its neighbours. As stated in a recent policy document issued by CJPME, “A stable, prosperous, and peaceful Middle East is a vital Canadian, Western and world interest, and should be the cornerstone on which Canada’s Middle East policy rests.” As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “True peace is not the absence of violence, but the presence of justice.” By applying pressure on Israel to adhere to the norms of international law, Israel’s friends in the world community helps to promote the security and economic well-being of *all* the peoples of the Middle East.

Why is Israel subject to so much Criticism?

CJPME has observed that open dialog is already very difficult when it comes to criticism of Israel. The reaction to Jimmy Carter's 2006 book *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid* is a perfect example of a recurring phenomenon of name-calling in the place of dialog. In virtually none of the public debate on his book were Carter's book's core premises debated. Rather, the debate focused on whether Carter or his book were anti-Semitic, or whether one could apply the label of "Apartheid" to Israel. (Carter, in fact, did not.) CJPME believes that it is incumbent on Canadians to ensure that debate on Israel move beyond name-calling, and address the true substance of the outcry against Israel.

CJPME believes that as long as Israel continues to ignore the international consensus for respect for human and humanitarian rights – as reflected in international law – it will continue to be subject to strong international criticism. Some of the ways in which Israel rejects this international consensus are as follows:

Israel maintains one of the longest military occupations in modern history

Israel militarily occupied East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 War, and has not relinquished them since. The UN Charter – a centerpiece of international law – outlaws the acquisition of territory by force. The signatories to the Fourth Geneva Convention voted unanimously on Dec. 5, 2001 that the Conventions applied to the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The Conventions are the preeminent modern instrument of international humanitarian law, and apply specifically during times of *war and occupation*. In 2002, and again in 2007, the Arab League offered peace and full normalization of relations with Israel were it to cease its occupation and withdraw to the 1967 borders.

Proponents of Israel suggest that its 1967 war was "defensive" and consequently, Israel has the right to retain territory it "won." This position is unsupported in international law.

Israeli abuses of international law occur daily

The human rights, and humanitarian rights abuses inflicted by Israeli government institutions in the occupied Palestinian territories are ongoing, daily. As documented by Israeli human rights organizations,¹ house demolitions, confiscation of private property, prolonged administrative detention of Palestinians, abuse and torture of Palestinians in detention, restrictions on movement, etc. are ongoing fixtures of Israel's occupation.

Israel's regime in the occupied Palestinian territories most certainly has elements resembling those of South African Apartheid

Opponents of Apartheid in South Africa have consistently called attention to the Apartheid-like elements of Israel's regime in the occupied Palestinian territories: Jewish-only roads; Jewish-only developments; discriminatory permit systems; military law applied to Palestinians, and civil law applied to Jews; etc. In May, 2009, the South African Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) issued a report² entitled: "Occupation, Colonialism, Apartheid: A re-assessment of Israel's practices in the occupied Palestinian territories under international law." The report states explicitly, "this study concludes that Israel has

¹ B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories is a good resource (<http://www.btselem.org>) as is The Public Committee against Torture in Israel (<http://www.stoptorture.org.il/en>.) See also the Jerusalem-based Israeli-Palestinian Alternative Information Center (<http://www.alternativenews.org/>)

² For the Executive Summary of the HSRC report, see: <http://www.cjpme.org/DisplayDocument.aspx?DocumentID=404>. The Website of the HSRC is <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/>

introduced a system of apartheid in the OPT [occupied Palestinian territory].” The detailed legal analysis was assembled by South African legal experts in conjunction with Israeli and other international lawyers.

Advancing Constructively

Given the plethora of ongoing and highly credible criticisms of Israel like those provided above, it takes little stretch of the imagination to wonder whether accusations of anti-Semitism in such cases are actually an attempt to stifle criticism of Israel. CJPME sincerely hopes that this is not the case, and that the discussion of how to deal with anti-Semitism and other hate crimes in Canadian society can proceed without dubiously linking them with criticism of Israel. As already suggested above, CJPME believes that justice and peace in the Middle East have been stymied precisely because the international community has been unable to openly debate the ongoing injustices perpetrated in the Middle East.

Hate and discrimination as manifested in our societies are hideous things. Nevertheless, topics of dialog cannot be banished from discussion in Canada because some misguided individuals may occasionally associate a head-covering with a particular point of view in a contentious public debate. Such incidents, and such individuals should be treated under the existing Canadian criminal code and human rights commissions. They cannot be used as an excuse to infringe on fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

International law has developed over decades to reflect an international consensus on human and humanitarian rights. Whether under deliberation in Canada, Israel or elsewhere, these rights, and the discussion of them in international public debate must be supported and promoted.

CJPME’s Formal Request to Testify at Hearings

The CPCCA has mentioned that it will be hosting hearings and calling witnesses on its questions of study. CJPME formally requests to be called as a witness to these hearings.