



– FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –

A Canadian will participate as observer in the inquiry launched by Israel

Montreal, June 15th, 2010 – Israel announced yesterday that it was setting up its own commission of inquiry into the controversial May 31 boarding of a humanitarian flotilla bound for Gaza. Israel had categorically opposed the opening of an independent international inquiry as requested by the United Nations Security Council. In an apparent attempt to pre-empt an international inquiry, Israel has launched its own inquiry which will include three conservative Israeli jurists and two foreign observers. The two international observers include former judge advocate general of the Canadian Army, Ken Watkin, and former head of the Ulster Unionists, Lord Trimble of the UK.

The mandate of the observers is limited: they have no right to vote on the work and findings of the commission, and will be lacking the right to question the soldiers. Benjamin Netanyahu also confirmed that the commission will not be directly questioning the military personnel involved, except for the military Chief of Staff, Gaby Ashkenazi. According to Netanyahu, the inquiry has two imperatives: “Preserving the freedom of action of our soldiers, and proving that our actions were defensive in nature and therefore justified [under international law.]” Benjamin Netanyahu therefore expects that the findings of the inquiry will provide a legal justification a posteriori of the raid.

Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon promptly issued a statement welcoming the establishment of the “independent public” commission in Israel. Yet Israeli media and jurists have described the commission as “not credible.” Amnon Rubinstein, former Israeli justice minister and leading jurist, says: “There is coffee without caffeine and there is an investigative committee without an investigation.” The popular Israeli daily Yediot Aharonot wrote: “It is obvious that this commission is for external consumption. Its purpose is not to investigate or examine the merits of decisions taken at the policy or military level.”

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) also questions the credibility of such a commission and its ability to shed light on the facts impartially and transparently. “Given the extreme circumstances surrounding the attack against the flotilla, it seems reasonable to question the credibility of this investigation,” said Tom Woodley, the President of CJPME. CJPME notes that Israel consistently shuns participation in international inquiries. For example, Israel refused to participate in the 2009 Goldstone Mission’s inquiry into its 22-day War on Gaza which began on Dec. 27, 2008. Israel also refused to participate in a Canadian Forces inquiry in 2006 following the death of Canadian peacekeeper Major Hess-Von Krudener in Lebanon from an Israeli guided missile.

About CJPME – *Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is a non-profit and secular organization bringing together men and women of all backgrounds who labour to see justice and peace take root again in the Middle East. Its mission is to empower decision-makers to view all sides with fairness and to promote the equitable and sustainable development of the region.*

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