



Dear Prime Minister,

A plea for urgent action on the human catastrophe unfolding in Gaza

Statement by the Group of 78 – March 18, 2024

We, as members of the Group of 78, a civil society organization first established by 78 eminent Canadians in 1981, feel compelled by the most recent events in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem to reinforce our earlier pleas (see our letters of October 28 and February 20) for more robust action to terminate Israel's, US enabled, war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed daily in the mandated Palestinian territories.

While we welcome Canada's recent decision to resume funding for UNRWA, we nevertheless implore our Government to be more forthright in condemning the human catastrophe currently unfolding in Gaza as famine grips a displaced and brutalized population enduring winter in makeshift dwellings and now, most recently, even subjected to tank and sniper fire when gathering around trucks providing famine relief.

Under these dire circumstances we call on the Government to:

1. Demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza;
2. Actively join in efforts to persuade the United States government to withdraw its veto against a ceasefire in the UN Security Council;
3. Demand the release of all hostages held by Hamas, and of all prisoners being held without charge by Israel;
4. Allow the Palestinian Authorities to restore civil rights and the rule of law in the remaining Palestinian territories;
5. Demand the immediate and unconditional opening of Gaza to all available forms of humanitarian assistance, especially famine relief;
6. Suspend all arms and military exports to Israel;
7. Sanction all Israeli officials who have called for ethnic cleansing and/or for the total destruction of Gaza, and those who have armed and supported

- extremist settlers committing serious human rights violations on the West Bank and in east Jerusalem;
8. Fully support South Africa's case before the International Court of Justice;
 9. Reverse Parliament's divisive and illogical decision to equate criticism of the Israeli government with anti-semitism in Canada;
 10. Protect citizens voicing concerns about the atrocities being committed in Gaza from official pronouncements impugning – or misrepresenting - their motives, and from sanctions imposed unilaterally, and without due process, by many employers, educational institutions, or public authorities.

We believe that it is now time for the Canadian government to openly acknowledge that Israel's current government is guided by a Zionist *Eretz Israel* policy that seeks to systematically demoralize, displace and terrorize the Palestinian population in all parts of the occupied territories; and that is explicitly designed to make a two-state solution impossible. Indeed, Prime Minister Netanyahu effectively tried to present this aggressive and illegal policy objective as a *fait accompli* when he spoke to the UN General Assembly against the backdrop of a map showing a "united" Israel – from the river to the sea!

Ultimately it is this reality that must be actively addressed by a Canadian foreign policy that lends credible, and consistent, support to the principles underlying the UN Charter and that seeks to restore diplomacy's place as the dominant mechanism for resolving international disputes.

Finally, we urge the Canadian government to understand that its complicity in the war crimes being committed by Israel is fueling a dangerous process of social and political polarization in this country; a process that threatens civility and an accelerated erosion of trust in, and respect for, the country's institutions, including its democracy. Moreover, we believe that this risk is significantly magnified by the government's deplorable, and misguided, attempt to impugn the motives of those Canadians – including many Jewish Canadians - who feel honour-bound to take part in peaceful demonstrations expressing their moral outrage at these events.

We urge that the government stay true to its declared principles in its actions, and that, in trying to protect its citizens from "feeling unsafe," it treats all citizens equally.

Cc: Pierre Poilievre, Jagmeet Singh, Yves-François Blanchet, Elizabeth May