Open letter to Sophie Chatel, MP on Gaza

November 12, 2026

A humanitarian crisis made by politics, not weather

Dear Ms. Chatel,

Last weekend, the first winter storm flooded families in about 70,000 tents in Gaza. Children, pregnant women, and elderly people are all trying to survive in cold flood waters. In Deir el-Balah, a sand embankment collapsed onto a tent sheltering displaced people. Four children and a woman were killed.

This was not simply bad weather. In Gaza nearly 2 million people live in tents and ruins. The UN says 294,250 families need emergency shelter assistance this winter, and available supplies can only partially help 18 percent of them. Tents, tarpaulins and shelter kits are blocked at Gaza's borders because Israeli authorities restrict and delay their entry. We remind you that the people enduring this catastrophe have been suffering the consequences of a genocide carried out against them for over three years, and are already malnourished, unhoused, sick and dying from disease as well as the continuing killings by the Israeli occupation forces in spite of the declared "ceasefire".

Who we are

We are your constituents in the Gatineau Hills. We have spent our careers in humanitarian assistance and international development, including leadership positions within the International Red Cross movement and Canadian aid organizations.

We know what an organized humanitarian response can achieve. We also know what emergency crises look like when governments decide not to act.

A catastrophe foretold

In June 2025, some of us joined 412 lawyers, academics, former diplomats and humanitarian leaders in an open letter to Prime Minister Carney. We urged Canada to insist on full humanitarian access, press Israel to lift its ban on UNRWA, and impose real consequences if aid stayed blocked, including a two-way arms embargo and an end to free trade with Israel. The Prime Minister had already promised "further concrete actions" if Israel kept restricting aid. Israel continues to restrict aid. And Canada has not taken concrete actions in response.

Instead, seventeen months of statements without consequences followed. Had Canada acted then, lives could have been saved, and families in Gaza would be facing this winter less hungry, sick and exposed. Our government is not reflecting the views of most Canadians. In August 2025, nearly two-thirds of the country called the situation in Gaza a "moral outrage."

Ottawa's unbearable silence

Since the storm, we have found no statement from the Prime Minister, Minister Anand or Global Affairs Canada. Yet Ottawa knew this was coming. Last December, Canada and nine other countries warned that civilians in Gaza faced "appalling conditions" as winter set in.

This week, the United Kingdom is gathering some 50 countries behind a call on Israel to ease restrictions on supplies before winter. Canada has not yet said whether it will join.

The Canadian government's public position is that Canada does not control events in Gaza. That is not an answer, for three reasons.

1. **Canada supports the government responsible.** Canada exported nearly $14.7 million in military goods and technology to Israel in 2025. In March, the House voted down Bill C-233, which would have closed the route for Canadian military parts to reach Israel through the United States. The Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement remains in force.
2. **Canada has not used the tools it does control.** Our sanctions target individual settlers, not the Israeli state. Our trade measures touch settlement goods, not trade with Israel.
3. **Canada has not led the humanitarian response.** Of the $100 million the Prime Minister announced at the UN in September 2026, $20 million went to security initiatives, including police training. One dollar in five went not to food or shelter, but to policing.

A legal duty, not a choice

In January 2024, the International Court of Justice found a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza. It ordered Israel to enable urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance. Blocking tents while children sleep in floodwater is the opposite of what the Court ordered.

Since then, the UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel has concluded that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have also concluded that Israel has committed acts that amount to genocide.

Canada is a party to the Genocide Convention. Under the Court's 2007 ruling in Bosnia v. Serbia, **the duty to prevent genocide begins the moment a state learns of a serious risk**. It requires every state to use all the means reasonably available to it. The test is not whether Canada controls Gaza. It is whether Canada used its influence. It has not.

The government says it will wait for the Court's final judgment. The Convention does not allow states to wait. Prevention that arrives after the fact is not prevention.

What we ask

In 2025, the Prime Minister himself said that denying humanitarian aid violates international law. We ask the government to act on its own words:

1. Join the UK-led call on Israel to open Gaza to winter shelter and supplies immediately.
2. Make Canada's next contribution entirely humanitarian, and large enough to matter, with shelter and food first.
3. Impose a full two-way arms embargo, including Canadian parts routed through the United States.
4. Suspend the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement and sanction those responsible for blocking aid.

And we ask something of you, Ms. Chatel. For nearly three years, Hills for Peace and Justice has written to you every single week asking to meet. We have gone to your constituency office in Le Plateau twice. Many of us have written to you individually. You have consulted many voices in this riding, but you have never met with us.

We ask you to meet with us within the coming days. We ask that you join your constituents on an upcoming Friday at 5:30 for the weekly vigil on the boardwalk in Wakefield. We also ask that you speak publicly on Gaza and carry these demands to your caucus and, in particular, to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and National Defence, as well as the Prime Minister.

Families in Gaza cannot wait for the next statement of concern. Neither can we.

Sincerely,

Signatories

Titles for identification purposes only.

Susan Johnson

Former Deputy Secretary General, Canadian Red Cross
Former Permanent Representative to the United Nations, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Chelsea

Molly Kane

Former Executive Director, Inter Pares
Former International Board Chair, ACORD (Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development)
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Rink de Lange

Former water and sanitation specialist
Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières
Sainte-Cécile-de-Masham

Leanne Olson

Former Healthcare Manager, RN, BScN
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Jim McKinnon

Former International Programme Manager,
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Firoze Manji

Former Africa Program Director,
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Former Chief Executive Officer,
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Susan Walsh

Former Executive Director, USC Canada
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Pat Mooney

Former Executive Director, ETC Group
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Lise Latrémouille

Former Executive Director, Inter Pares
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Doug MacDonald

Former Senior Manager, Red Cross
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Wakefield

cc:

The Right Honourable Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Anita Anand, Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Honourable Maninder Sidhu, Minister of International Trade
The Honourable David J. McGuinty, Minister of National Defence
Ilse Turnsen, Hills for Peace and Justice

Sources

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- OCHA Humanitarian Situation Report (Nov. 5, 2026)
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- Global Affairs Canada: Joint statement on the Gaza humanitarian response (Dec. 30, 2025)
- Global Affairs Canada: Canada's response to the crisis
- CBC: Canada pledges $100M for Palestine at UNGA (Sept. 22, 2026)
- CBC: Carney calls denial of aid a violation of international law
- Open letter to Prime Minister Carney, June 9, 2025, 412 signatories (via Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada)
- Joint statement of the leaders of Canada, the UK and France on Gaza (May 19, 2025)
- Angus Reid Institute: Canadians on Israel and Gaza (Aug. 2025)
- UN Commission of Inquiry: report on genocide in Gaza (Sept. 16, 2025)
- The New Arab: Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch genocide findings (Dec. 2024)
- Al-Monitor: Human Rights Watch finds acts of genocide in water deprivation (Dec. 2024)
- Wikipedia: Gaza genocide recognition (Canada's position)