

November 14, 2023

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P., Ottawa

The Honourable Melanie Joly, P.C., Minister of Foreign Affairs

**RE: Letter for Canadian Officials from the Women Peace and Security Community of Canada in relation to the Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories Violence**

Prime Minister and Minister Joly

We, the undersigned are concerned members of the Women Peace and Security community in Canada. We are a part of a volunteer network of expert feminists working in policy, research, advocacy, and development. We are committed to ensuring the equitable, consistent, and principled application of the Women Peace and Security agenda in Canada and around the world.

We have been watching in horror at this Canadian government's promotion and endorsement of the violations of international law perpetrated by the state of Israel throughout the ongoing attacks on the Occupied Territories of Palestine. International humanitarian law makes clear that war crimes are non-reciprocal: violence does not permit violence. **We condemn all forms of violence against any and all civilians as does the law. Attacks on civilians, civilian infrastructure, and deprivation of necessities of life are all strictly forbidden in the Geneva Conventions to which all countries are party.** Israel has consistently acted in violation of the laws of war through attacks on hospitals and ambulances, humanitarian aid convoys, schools, and refugee camps. Warnings prior to these attacks do not absolve Israel of its responsibility to minimize harm to civilians. These warnings do, however, show clear intent to target civilian objects and further destroy Gazan society and critical infrastructure.

To date, over 11,423 Palestinians have been killed, another 29,890 injured<sup>1</sup>, and 1.5 million internally displaced<sup>2</sup>. 2.2 million Palestinians are being deprived of food, water, electricity, and fuel<sup>3</sup>. The impact on children has been grave, with Save the Children reporting that more

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<sup>1</sup> Truth About Palestine: – The Numbers, November 13, 2023. Available at: <https://truthaboutpalestine.com/#the-numbers> Sources include Al Jazeera, Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, Palestine Red Crescent Society. Site provides that “The collapse of medical and communication services has impeded casualty updates since November 10.”

<sup>2</sup> OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel - reported impact | Day 32. November 8, 2023. Available at: <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-32>

<sup>3</sup> Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, on the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire". November 5, 2023. Available at:

children have been killed in Gaza than in all other armed conflicts per year, for the last three year<sup>4</sup>. Neither the immensity of this loss or our outrage can be overstated.

Canada's October 27<sup>th</sup> abstention from the UN General Assembly Resolution calling for a humanitarian truce rang loudly across our country. The UNGA resolution echoes popular opinion, with over 3700 protests in support of Palestine recorded worldwide<sup>5</sup>. Despite having long presented themselves as supporters of international justice and accountability, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, this government was unwilling to support the global consensus to end hostilities and prevent further deaths. The thousands of lives lost in the subsequent 19 days are in part the responsibility of Canada for failing to uphold the very principles we claim to champion and promote domestically and abroad.

We, the undersigned, are writing to compel our government to act according to the values and principles outlined by our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the positive obligations the government of Canada has in relation to identifying and denouncing genocide. Canada has repeatedly committed to "never again" however continues to permit genocide to be committed unchecked. Despite significant evidence of intent, means, and actions constituting crimes of genocide perpetrated by Israel<sup>6</sup>, Canada has refused to identify these acts as even immoral, let alone genocidal. This tacit support of these crimes erodes Canada's status a leader in human rights and international normative ordering globally. It further legitimizes hateful attacks and suppression of freedom of expression, and withers civil and productive political discourse domestically.

In Canada, students, professors, doctors, union leaders, public servants and employees of private companies have all faced reprisals following their expressions of support for Palestine and contestation of Israel's crimes. The government of Canada has a duty to uphold the *Charter* and to protect freedom of expression for all Canadians. Hate speech, suppression of dissent, and reprisals following legitimate political expression must be unequivocally curtailed.

The government of Canada must immediately:

- Demand an immediate and sustained ceasefire;

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<https://www.unhcr.org/news/speeches-and-statements/statement-principals-inter-agency-standing-committee-situation-israel>

<sup>4</sup> Save the Children International, "Gaza: 3,195 Children Killed in Three Weeks. Surpasses Annual Number of Children Killed in Conflict Zones Since 2019". October 29, 2023. Available at:

<https://www.savethechildren.net/news/gaza-3195-children-killed-three-weeks-surpasses-annual-number-children-killed-conflict-zones>

<sup>5</sup> ACLED. November 7 2023. Infographic: Global Demonstrations in Response to the Israel-Palestine Conflict. Available at:

<https://acleddata.com/2023/11/07/infographic-global-demonstrations-in-response-to-the-israel-palestine-conflict/>

<sup>6</sup> Shaw, Martin. November 6 2023. The Uses and Abuses of the Term 'Genocide' in Gaza: The contested word is invoked by both sides in the debate over the current war. *New Lines Magazine*

- Cease all financial and military support to Israel;
- Ensure immediate and adequate humanitarian aid to Gaza;
- Denounce violations of international law and commission of genocide;
- Clearly express support for dialogue and negotiation to end this war;
- Recommit to upholding the international rules-based order and applying this equally to all states;
- Unequivocally uphold freedom of expression and protections from political reprisals in Canada;
- Proactively address and prevent ant-Palestinian, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim racism and violence in Canada.

Canada has long been a champion of feminist foreign policy and the Women Peace and Security Agenda, as well as the Children and Armed Conflict agenda and the International Criminal Court. As a country, we are currently campaigning for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council, and yet we as Canadians are expected to sit quietly and trust in our government while Israel's grave violations are condoned and human rights are eroded domestically. As Canadian feminist peace practitioners, we refuse to be complicit in these crimes and we will not support any government that is. As members of civil society, we are exercising our civic duty to demand better, each hour passing is an hour full of countless civilian deaths.

Signed,

Ainun Afroza, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace  
 Sahada Alolo  
 Dr. Nahid Azad, Federation of Medical Women on Canada  
 Joy Cudjoe  
 Monique Cuillerier  
 Anne Catherine Bajard  
 Carole Doucet, International Consulting Inc.  
 Theresa Dunn, TDunnconsulting  
 Carolyn Ferguson  
 Patsy George, WILPF Canada  
 Hannah Hadikin, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace  
 Habibah Haque  
 Rehana Hashmi, Sisters Trust  
 Dr Huguette Hayden, IPPNWC, WILPF  
 Corey Levine  
 Tamara Lorincz, WILPF Canada and VOW  
 Robin Neustaeter  
 Bruna Nota  
 Sara Quddus  
 Jo Rodrigues  
 Laura Sewell

Bénédicte Santoire  
Andrea Siew  
Jan Slakov, Conscience Canada  
Marla Slavner  
Dr. Heather Tasker  
Kim Vance-Mubanga  
Erica Wilson  
Kathrin Winkler, Nova Scotia Voice for Women for Peace  
Christine Wood  
Ellen Woodsworth, WILPF Canada  
Canada's Voice of Women for Peace, rep by Rana Zaman  
Hope for Her Global Canada, Rep by Maria Mbanga-Mazvimavi  
International Women's Rights Project, rep by Susan Bazilli  
Sudanese Women's Rights Action, rep by Nazik Kabalo  
Sustainable Human Empowerment (SHE) Associates Inc., rep by Urooj Mian  
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, rep by Marlene Adam

Cc:

The Honourable Marci Ien, M.P., Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Youth  
The Honourable Mobina Jaffer, Senator  
The Honourable Marilou McPhedron, Senator  
The Honourable Rebecca Patterson, Senator  
His Excellency Bob Rae, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN  
Ambassador Jacqueline O'Neill, Women, Peace and Security  
Pierre Poilievre, M.P., Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party  
Jagmeet Singh, M.P., Leader of the New Democratic Party  
Yves-Francois Blanchet, M.P., Leader of the Bloc Québécois Party  
Elizabeth May, M.P., Green Party  
Heather McPherson, M.P., New Democratic Party