

An open letter to the Government of Canada
A call to consistency in Canada's stance toward Israel-Palestine.

Dear Mr. Trudeau and Mme Joly:

As a member of Mennonite Church Canada, I wish to express my deep concerns about the human rights situation in Israel-Palestine. I hope that as a “steadfast friend and ally of Israel” Canada might take a leading role in pressing Israel to uphold international law and honour the legitimate rights of Palestinians to equality, dignity, and self-determination. As a fellow democracy and co-signer with Israel of conventions of international law, Canada must do more in this regard.

We Mennonites have been involved in Israel-Palestine since 1949, through our humanitarian agency, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), and other partnerships with religious organizations. Over 74 years, we have witnessed a deepening entrenchment of the occupation and a steady erosion of the prospects for a just peace in the land. Because of this, and in response to the call of Palestinian Christians in Israel-Palestine ([Kairos](#)) and Palestinian and Israeli Jewish partners and friends working for peaceful co-existence, our denomination passed a [resolution](#) in 2016 calling for education and advocacy toward a just peace in the land.

I applaud the fact that Canada’s official policy in relation to Israel-Palestine reflects “friendship” with the Palestinian people. It recognizes the authority of international law and the right of Palestinians to self-determination. However, I am distressed to observe the glaring dissonance between official Canadian policy toward Israel-Palestine, and Canada’s actions, or its inactions. In particular, I wish to highlight the following:

- **Settlements.** Canada’s policy states that Israel’s construction of Israeli settlements is an “obstacle to peace” and conflicts with the Geneva Fourth Convention prohibiting the occupying power to settle its own citizens on the occupied land. Yet when UN resolutions seek to address violations of this tenet, Canada has almost always voted against them.

Canada has renewed the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement, which has no caveats regarding human rights and international law, and no requirement that products made in settlements be labeled as such, rather than as “product of Israel.” Canada also gives charitable status to the Jewish National Fund, which currently and historically has participated in the erasure of Palestinian communities.

These moves expose Canada as complicit in the colonization and de facto annexation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This enablement through silence renders virtually impossible the “two state solution” persistently touted by Canada.

- **Freedom of journalists.** When Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was killed by Israeli sniper fire this spring, Canada refrained from pressing for an independent investigation (i.e., one not controlled by the Israeli government). This incident brings to light a long pattern of Israeli intimidation of journalists.

- **Ethno-nationalism.** Canada has remained silent in the wake of Israel's recent moves (particularly the Nation-State Law of 2021) to entrench itself as a nationalist state that privileges people of Jewish heritage and thus marginalizes the Palestinians who are rooted in the same land. I note in particular [Amnesty](#) International's recent research and report identifying Israel as an apartheid state. Canada has condemned this report without detailing what is wrong or inaccurate in it.
- **Incarceration of children.** Canada has not spoken out publicly against other well-documented cases of the military incarceration of Palestinian children, often under brutal and inhumane conditions.

The focus here is on Israeli state policy. I treasure our denomination's interfaith partnerships with the Jewish community, especially as they relate to common moral and religious causes, and I am committed to combatting antisemitism and all other forms of racism.

I affirm Canada's foreign policy in relation the Israel-Palestine for tilting toward justice and dignity for Palestinians. But I am disappointed that Canada has not matched policy with action. Words are not enough. The status quo cannot go on. It is intolerable for the Palestinians living in occupied territories to be without citizenship, and for those who live in Israel to be second-class citizens.

I call on Canada to take concrete steps towards ending Israel's illegal military occupation. I urge the government of Canada to take the following concrete actions:

1. Support Israel in entering renewed, good-faith negotiations with Palestinians for equal rights, dignity, and self-determination.
2. Support the work of the International Criminal Court in The Hague in investigating infractions of international law in Israel-Palestine.
3. Restructure the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement to ban importation of settlement products.
4. Appoint a Special Envoy to monitor the treatment of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention.

I believe that Canada can take a much bolder role in facilitating renewed efforts toward solving the conundrum that is Israel-Palestine. Canada has been a leader in the past, and I urge the government of Canada to build on this legacy through an unflagging commitment to peace with justice.

Thank you for your attention to my concerns. I would be honoured to receive a response in the near future.

Sincerely,