

## **An Open Letter to the Palestinian People from Canada on the Occasion of the Canadian Prime Minister's Visit to the Middle East**

Dear People of Palestine,

Greetings from Canada, and may peace be with you, and upon your land.

On January 20 the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, will begin a visit to the Middle East. Although there are stops scheduled for Jordan and Ramallah, the main focus of the trip will be to visit Israel.

As you may know, our Canadian Prime Minister has gone out of his way to support Israel since he came to power. He is widely touted in Israel and in the Jewish community abroad as "Israel's best friend in the world." His government has promised "unconditional" support for Israel and he has largely fulfilled that promise.

Conversely, Mr. Harper has done very little to demonstrate friendship to the Palestinian people. For example, when the Palestinian Authority made its bid at the United Nations to seek observer status as a state in 2012, not only did the government of Canada oppose this legitimate action, it actively lobbied other states to oppose it. It also issued threats against the Palestinian Authority and warned of severe consequences should the PA carry through with its UN bid. We recognize it is difficult to characterize these actions in any other way than as being anti-Palestinian.

We are members and adherents of the United Church of Canada who have formed the United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel. Our vision is one that we believe is shared by many of you, one in which Palestinians and Israelis live freely and securely, everyone accorded the full spectrum of human rights. In fact, this is the absolute minimum. We share the dream of the prophets of old a nation that is a beacon of light and blessing to the whole world.

Whether this is through one state for both peoples or two states for two peoples we do not know and do not presume to decide for you. What is essential is that everyone, Palestinians and Israelis, can live free from fear and indeed prosper in the richness that the land offers. For this to happen, the Occupation must end. Israeli military rule and dominance over Palestinians must stop.

This vision, shared by a great many Canadians, is not one that finds expression in a pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian viewpoint. Canada has historically played a more even-handed role in the conflict between Israel and Palestine, based on support for human rights and international law. Such a vision has previously manifested itself in support for UN resolutions that call on Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territory it has occupied since 1967, while at the same time supporting an Israeli state within the 1967 borders.

We are especially distressed by the current Canadian government's response to the deepening of the Occupation that is manifested in the ever expanding settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Mr. Harper has turned a blind eye to settlement expansion in the West Bank.

And so, with the arrival of Prime Minister Harper in the Middle East, we want you to know that he does not speak for all Canadians when he takes sides with one people against another. To do so, does not promote peace, but suggests a continuing control over the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, we want to reiterate that there is another Canadian perspective and position that is very different from the one that Mr. Harper and his large entourage will have on display during his visit. We and many other Canadians believe that the primary obstacle to peace is Israel's occupation of the Palestinian people. We are proud that our church denomination supports a boycott of Israeli settlement products and are doing our part to participate in the boycott and use it as an opportunity to highlight the injustice of the settlements.

While we are not under the illusion that the government of Mr. Harper will change its position on Israel's occupation, we continue to work on creating a climate in Canada that will produce government actions and policies based on the promotion of human rights and international law. Hopefully, a future visit by a Canadian Prime Minister will be an occasion where both the Palestinian and Israeli people can take hope that Canada is a country it can depend upon to be fair and just in its dealings with Israel and Palestine.

In the meantime, know that you have supporters in Canada who are genuinely concerned for the well-being of the Palestinian people.

In solidarity,

Rev. Steve Berube,  
co-chair, United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel  
January 18, 2014, Canada