



Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

60 Lowther Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5R 1C7

www.quakerservice.ca

Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6

January 15, 2009

Dear Stephen Harper,

The Canadian Friends Service Committee, the peace and social concerns arm of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada, wishes to express its profound sorrow, and profound opposition to the Israeli bombing and invasion of Gaza.

We call upon the Canadian government to demand an immediate ceasefire by Israel, and a withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

We acknowledge the emotional stress that Israelis living near the Gaza border have experienced, over the past several years, as a result of the firing of qassam rockets, but we also acknowledge the far more extreme level of emotional and physical suffering experienced by the people of Gaza, over the past three years, as a result of Israeli-led sanctions, which resulted in the frequent cutting off of food, water, medicine, electricity, and other basic necessities to the people of Gaza.

We oppose the use of violence, in all of its forms, and by both sides, but we feel compelled to acknowledge that the relationship between Israel and Gaza is not one of symmetrical conflict. Israel is a first world nation with one of the largest militaries in the world, complete with the most modern air, land and sea-based weapons and vehicles of war. The much talked about qassam rockets of Hamas are the weapons of a desperate, besieged and oppressed people. In such an asymmetrical situation, the primary responsibility for initiating a ceasefire must lie with the larger invading power.

Since late December 2008, when the military attack on Gaza began, the Israeli military has killed some nine hundred Palestinian men, women and children, and an already devastated medical infrastructure is collapsing further under the weight of hundreds of Gazans with injuries. No claim by Israel, of having a right to defend its borders, can morally justify such mass killing and devastation.

During the 1930's and 40's, many Quakers gave needed support to European Jews, when the Jews of Europe were a threatened people. Today, we must recognize that the state of Israel has become an oppressive, expansionist military power, and that, since 1948, and more intensely since 1967, the Palestinian people have been the primary victims. That same spirit that has called us, as Quakers, over the years, to oppose slavery, to oppose anti-Semitism, and to work for peace and social equity in various contexts, now calls us to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people, to acknowledge the victimization they have experienced, and continue to experience, and

to work for a just peace by just and nonviolent means.

During the fighting before and after the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, some 750 000 Palestinians were forced from their homes, and compelled to leave their ancestral land, that portion of British mandate Palestine that became Israel. Today, we would refer to such an act as ethnic cleansing. In 1948, the Palestinian people called it the *Nakba* (the catastrophe). Many of these people, forced to leave their homes, settled on the West Bank and in Gaza, under Jordanian and Egyptian occupation respectively, in the wake of the war.

In 1967, the Israeli government and military illegally attacked and occupied Gaza and the remainder of historical Palestine, (the West Bank including East Jerusalem). This invasion, and ongoing occupation, was and remains a fundamentally illegal act under international law. The building of Jewish settlements on the illegally occupied land of the Palestinians, over the past four decades, constitutes an additional illegal act under international law, and exposes Israel for what it is, an expansionary imperialist power.

The Canadian government's increasing tendency to march completely in step with Washington and the Israeli government on questions of Israeli foreign policy, is indefensible. In particular, we are outraged by Canada's shameful decision, on January 12th 2009, to cast the one vote against a U.N. Human Rights Council resolution condemning Israel's "massive human rights violations" in Gaza.

In addition to working for an immediate ceasefire and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, we call upon the Canadian government to work, in good faith, for a long term, just peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Such a peace with justice would include: a complete Israeli withdrawal from the lands occupied in 1967, (including Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem), the dismantling, or evacuation, of most if not all of the Jewish settlements built on this occupied land, and a commitment by the international community to respect whatever form of governance the Palestinian people choose in a post-occupation era. We recognize that both two-state, one-state and confederative multi-state solutions have been proposed, as representing the best manifestation of peace with justice, and we respect the right of the Palestinian people to choose whatever solutions they feel best address their needs.

While many leaders talk about peace, the annexation of Palestinian land, and the oppression of the Palestinian people, continues. We must recognize that the absence of violence and the presence of justice are equal aspects of any meaningful peace. It is up to Canada, and other first world nations, to end our increasingly unquestioning support for Israel, and work honestly for such a meaningful peace with justice.

In Friendship,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Merrill Stewart', with a stylized, flowing script.

Merrill Stewart
Clerk

Cc: Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Opposition and of the Liberal Party
Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Quebecois
Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party