

Canada must urge Israel to resume negotiations for peace within International Law

Recently, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs travelled to the Middle East, an admirable thing to do in a region so in need of peace. KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives believes that the government of Canada can play a positive role in the region by urging the Israeli government to support peace talks grounded in international law. This includes renewed Canadian support for the long-established international consensus that a Palestinian state be established within the pre-1967 borders.

The government of Canada has recently shifted Canada's foreign policy towards a forceful defense of the Israeli government's approach to the Palestinians. This has been made clear through recent Canadian votes at the United Nations in defense of Israel's settlement expansion, the withdrawal of funds from both Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations working for Palestinian rights, and the recent demands of Canada's Foreign Minister that the Palestinian leadership remove any preconditions before restarting peace talks.

On his recent trip to Israel and Palestine, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, John Baird, echoed the Israeli government's position when he insisted that the Palestinian leadership "return to the table without preconditions." Palestinian officials maintain that illegal construction of Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian lands must stop, and that talks over territory should be based on pre-war 1967 borders. The Prime Minister of Israel rejects outright the pre-1967 borders.

Using the pre-1967 borders as the basis for talks is a long-established framework at the UN and is the position of the Quartet – the UN, the United States, the European Union and Russia. It is also the formal position of the Canadian government itself. Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada's policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict states that "Canada does not recognize permanent Israeli control over territories occupied in 1967 (the Golan Heights, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip)." There are now 500,000 Israelis living in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank in large settlements that do not permit Palestinian residents. Referring to the settlements as "facts on the ground," the Israeli government seeks international acceptance of settlements in negotiations. This is in direct violation of international law and Canada's own policy; indeed the entire settlement policy has turned the West Bank into isolated pockets of Palestinian-controlled land, and many observers are suggesting that Israel's own practices have made the "two-state solution" all but impossible.

KAIROS believes that Canada must honour its international obligation to work for long-sought peace and to defend the human rights of all the people in the region, including the right to self-determination. Two states remain both Canadian government and KAIROS policy. KAIROS urges Canada to hold to the framework that Minister Baird outlined for the Canadian government in June 2011 when he said that "We support a two-state solution.... obviously – that solution has got to be based on the '67 borders." He also stated that any land swaps should be agreed upon "mutually."

KAIROS has long agreed with Canadian foreign policy that a sustainable peace with justice requires the recognition and implementation of the Palestinian right to self determination, including the right to establish a fully sovereign, viable Palestinian state. It also requires the recognition of Israel's existence as a sovereign state within internationally recognized borders.

KAIROS has consistently called for full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions related to the conflict which require Israel to withdraw to its borders as they were on June 4, 1967, and for the countries of the region and other parties to recognize Israel within those borders. To this we now add that the Canadian

government must respect its own policies in all its dealings with the representatives of both Israel and the Palestinians.

Support for peace with justice and eventual reconciliation are the best expressions of friendship that Canada can offer.

As we keep the people of Israel and the Palestinian Territories in our prayers, KAIROS reminds its constituency that it is always important to contact your member of parliament with your concerns and thoughts on this matter.

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