

- For Immediate Release -

TORONTO ANTI-APARTHEID GROUPS DEMONSTRATE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF GAZA

(Toronto) -- On December 2 at 1pm, approximately 200 people, led by the Canadian Arab Federation (CAF), Palestine House, and the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA), rallied outside the Israeli Consulate in Toronto to protest Israel's military campaign against the people of the Gaza Strip. The protest was also endorsed by the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War, the Canadian Peace Alliance, and Not In Our Name: Jews Against Israel's Wars.

Since the summer, which saw Israel begin a major military campaign in Gaza called "Operation Summer Rains", now renamed "Operation Autumn Clouds", the Israeli military has killed over 300 Palestinian civilians, including 89 children and 25 women, in Gaza. "We have heard enough empty condemnation and rhetoric about human rights from the so-called international community. Each day, the people of Palestine are being killed by the most well-armed and heavily financed war machine in the Middle East. It is time for the people of Canada to raise their collective voice and demand that the Canadian government take an unequivocal stand against these barbaric Israeli policies," says Dr. Farid Ayad, President of Palestine House.

These military campaigns further endanger a population in the midst of a humanitarian crisis. According to the World Bank, unemployment levels reached 40% in the first quarter of 2006 and over 80% of the population are living below the poverty line. Gaza's only power plant, which Israel destroyed in June, has not been repaired, leaving most of the population without electricity. For over three years, the United Nations and other aid agencies have warned of chronic hunger and malnutrition damaging the development of at least 25% of Gaza's children. These are all direct consequences of Israel's policy of closure, in which entry and exit to Gaza are prevented by electric fences and the Israeli military, which has also destroyed much of Gaza's infrastructure. "The devastation in Gaza will not stop as long as Israel enjoys impunity," says Navyug Gill of the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA). "The world's governments have expressed approval for Israel's massacres and are contributing to besieging and starving the Palestinians. The world's people must take action to stop Israel's impunity, including boycotts, sanctions, and divestment campaigns."

Instead of sanctioning the occupying power responsible for this crisis, Canada, like the US and the countries of Europe, have enforced a blockade against the people of Gaza and are contributing to their starvation. Prime Minister Harper and Foreign Minister Peter McKay instead speak of the 'shared values' of Israel and Canada, and, during the "Summer Rains" campaign, the 'measured response' of the Israeli war machine. "CAF accuses the Harper government of complicity in Israel's war crimes," says Khaled Mouammar of the Canadian Arab

Federation (CAF). "The government has openly supported the Israeli assault against Gaza and Lebanon and has voted at the UN against resolutions supporting the Palestinian people. It has not uttered a single word to denounce the brutal illegal occupation to which the Palestinian people have been subjected for decades and the Israeli violation of virtually every article of the Fourth Geneva Convention. These violations are war crimes, as defined by international law."

The protesters demanded an immediate end to Israel's military campaign, to its apartheid policies in the region, and to Canadian support for it. Mouammar continues: "CAF believes that peace for Israelis and Palestinians can be assured only if Israel complies with international law and Security Council resolutions by terminating completely its illegal occupation of Palestinian land, by allowing Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, and by granting Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel equal rights."

James Clark of the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War adds: "The Canadian government must bear responsibility for the suffering in Gaza and Palestine. As the first Western government to cut all aid to the Palestinian Authority following democratic elections last year, Canada has shown both contempt for the democratic process and disregard for the welfare of thousands of Palestinians who now face hunger and misery on a mass scale."

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