

April 13, 2016

Dear M. Dion,

On 12 April 2016 Amnesty International released a report, "Israeli Government must cease intimidation of human rights defenders, protect them from attacks". As groups concerned with peace, justice and human rights for Palestinians and Israelis we call on you and the Canadian government to make a public statement upholding the rights of peaceful Palestinian and Israeli human rights defenders in accordance with the [United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Defenders](#).

Recent threats against Palestinian and Israeli human rights defenders have included such things as:

- Israeli Transportation and Intelligence Minister Yisrael Katz's calling for "[targeted civil eliminations](#)" of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) leaders, specifically mentioning by name Boycott National Committee member Omar Barghouti.
- Death threats against the Palestinian activist Emad abu-Shamsiyah, who filmed the [March 2016 extrajudicial killing of a wounded Palestinian suspect](#) Abed al-Fattah Yusri al-Sharif.
- Ongoing death threats, [unwarranted arrests](#), and [attempts to shut down](#) the work of Hebron-based Palestinian nonviolent activists Issa Amro and Farid al-Atrash.
- Death threats against the staff of al-Haq staff, a prominent and respected Palestinian human rights NGOs. These threats are directly connected to the organization's work with the International Criminal Court in The Hague.
- Ongoing [attempts to shut down](#) Breaking the Silence, an organization for Israeli veterans that publishes testimonies of Israeli soldiers who have witnessed war crimes.
- Arrest and imprisonment of Palestinian Parliamentarian Khalida Jarrar who was sentenced to 15 months imprisonment after, according to Amnesty International, "unfair proceedings before a military court and during which it appeared that pre-trial detention – including the use of administrative detention -- was being used to punish her and pressure her into accepting a guilty plea." Amnesty went on to state, "Her lawyers say that the authorities never supported their accusations with evidence."
- Additionally, in recent years, the Israeli authorities have passed a number of laws aimed at curtailing freedom of expression. These include laws that deny government funding to organizations that commemorate the Nakba (catastrophe) and that make it a "civil wrong" for any Israeli citizen or institution to call for a boycott of Israeli institutions or companies in response to Israel's occupation or illegal settlements.

These are not empty threats. For example, there was an [arson attack](#) on the home of a key Palestinian witness in last year's Duma arson attack case, which killed a Palestinian mother and father and their 18-month old son.

The safety of witnesses, whistleblowers, and nonviolent activists must be protected, as well as the right to freedom of expression and peaceful protest. It is incumbent upon the Department of Foreign Affairs to closely monitor and respond to the human rights situation in Israel/Palestine.

To this, we call on the Department of Foreign Affairs to make clear to its counterparts in Israel, in a written public statement, that the Canadian government expects the Israeli government to preserve the safety and uphold the rights of Palestinian and Israeli human rights defenders. Incitement to violence against human rights defenders must not be countenanced, whether coming from Israeli government officials or lawless right-wing settlers.

This issue ought to be of great interest to all Members of Parliament following the passage of the Motion that the government, “condemn any and all attempts by Canadian organizations, groups or individuals to promote the BDS movement, both here at home and abroad.” We would remind MP’s that supporters of BDS are also typically strong supporters of human rights for all people. Further that these Palestinian’s are also strong human rights supporters and are deserving of protection from the occupying power under the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention.

Rev. Steve Berube and Rev. Marianna Harris  
Co-chairs: United Network for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel

Tyler Levitan  
Campaigns Coordinator: Independent Jewish Voices Canada

Fr. Robert Assaly  
Treasurer-elect, CEPAL Canadian Palestinian Educational Exchange

cc: Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau  
Hon. Rona Ambrose  
Hon. Thomas Mulcair  
Hon. [Rhéal Fortin](#)  
Hon. Elizabeth May