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October 27, 2021

The Honourable Minister Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
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RE: Canada must protect human rights defenders and call on the Israeli Government to rescind its designation of human rights defenders as “terrorist organizations”

Dear Minister Joly:

Greetings to you from The United Church of Canada.

Congratulations and best wishes to you in your new role as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I write today calling on you to take urgent action to protect Palestinian human rights defenders under attack by the Government of Israel. In its declaration of 22 October designating six Palestinian human rights groups as “terrorist organizations”, Israel has significantly escalated its attacks on human rights defenders and its repression on and delegitimization of civil society. Canada must call on the Government of Israel to immediately rescind this decision. We request an urgent meeting with you to discuss this issue.

Over the past several years, Israeli, Palestinian, and international human rights and humanitarian organizations have faced an increasingly difficult operating environment and shrinking civic space in Israel and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, which negatively impacts their ability to deliver assistance and advocate on behalf of Palestinian human rights. Defense for Children International Palestine (DCIP)--a United Church of Canada partner--has experienced and borne the brunt of increasing disinformation campaigns by both Israeli government actors and private actors that target its institutional donors, partners, its board, and its staff. DCIP is an independent, local Palestinian child rights organization dedicated to defending and promoting the rights of children living in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. For 30 years, DCIP has investigated, documented, and exposed grave human rights violations against Palestinian children; held both Israeli and Palestinian authorities accountable to universal human rights principles; and advocated at the international and national levels to advance access to justice and protection for children. The United Church has written multiple letters, urging Canada to appoint a Special Envoy to investigate and report on the treatment of Palestinian children to determine the situation for itself and take appropriate action to protect Palestinian children's rights.

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As DCIP defends Palestinian children in the Israeli military courts and exposes grave violations against Palestinian children at the hands of Israeli forces, delegitimization and disinformation campaigns against DCIP have been advanced by a network of rising nationalist Israeli civil society organizations and associated organizations outside of Israel, with the support of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

These efforts take the form of targeted and organized defamation campaigns based on a range of allegations related to the violation of counter-terrorism legislation and international law. These allegations are erroneous, misrepresent, and distort critical factual or legal elements. Despite grave risks, DCIP's staff works tirelessly with limited resources to defend and promote the rights of children living in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. DCIP carries out its work in a situation of armed conflict where perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity enjoy systemic impunity. As the Government of Israel becomes increasingly emboldened and pushes forward efforts to criminalize legitimate human rights and humanitarian work carried out by Palestinian human rights and civil society organizations, we are deeply concerned that politically motivated prosecutions in Israel's military court system will become the norm. How Canada responds will be a true test of its commitment to protect human rights defenders, consistent with Canada's [Voices at Risk guidelines](#) on supporting human rights defenders.

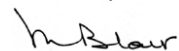
The United Church of Canada joins DCIP in rejecting the recent designation as another unjust action by Israeli authorities to criminalize and eliminate DCIP's lawful human rights and child protection work.

We call on Canada to:

- denounce this attack on human rights defenders and demand that the Government of Israel immediately rescind this action;
- act to end complicity and any support to attempts to silence and delegitimize human rights defenders;
- work with like-minded countries in the international community to use all available means to hold Israeli authorities accountable for targeted attacks and repression of Palestinian civil society organizations.

We would look forward to hearing from you regarding a meeting. Grace and peace to you in the important leadership you give.

Sincerely,



Rev. Michael Blair
General Secretary
The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada

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