

Gaza: Canada's complicity

Come to a
vigil against the siege of Gaza:
Saturday, December 2nd, 4:00 pm
Vancouver Art Gallery
(Robson Street Side)

We condemn Israel's assault against the population of the Gaza Strip, and call on the Government of Canada to take a strong position in support of human rights and international law and against collective punishment, ethnic cleansing and state terrorism.

The situation in Gaza is critical: inadequate water, electricity, and medicine; widespread hunger, poverty, and unemployment; schools and other services rendered inoperative; constant bombardments and attacks by the Israeli military. If this siege continues, more spreading disease, malnutrition, and violence are inevitable.

Over the past few months the Israeli army's actions – cynically named in the summer months "Operation Summer Rain" and now bearing the title "Operation Autumn Clouds" – have brought unbearable persecution to the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip,

including the killing of many women, children and other civilians.

During the four months ending November 8th, 335 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip, including 30 women and 85 youth under 17 years old. Israeli media stated that only 130 of those killed were armed. Therefore, in less than half a year more than 250 civilians were killed by the Israeli army in Gaza, not to mention hundreds more wounded and maimed. Between November 8 and 14, 47 more people in Beit Hanoun were killed. Many men between the age of 16 and 45 were arrested and taken away. Two women were killed protesting in front of a mosque that was later destroyed, and 19 women, children and men were killed by Israeli artillery while sleeping in their home.

Meanwhile, to Canada's shame, our government remains prominent among those who continue to strangle the Palestinian economy by withholding vital aid to the Palestinian Authority, because Palestinians elected a Hamas majority early this year. Palestinian public workers – teachers, hospital workers, engineers – have been without pay for eight months, devastating the economy and leaving the PA unable to maintain the infrastructure vital for the well being of its people. This amounts to collective punishment of Palestinians for the crime of exercising their democratic franchise. Israeli authorities have abducted and imprisoned dozens of Palestinian elected representatives, without a murmur of protest from the government of Canada.

We call on the government of Canada to:

- Recognize the democratically elected government of the Palestinian people, end sanctions and restore Canada's foreign aid funding to the Palestinian Authority.
- Issue a clear call demanding that Israel end the siege on Gaza and its war against the civilian population of Gaza, withdraw its armed forces from the Strip, restore the tax revenues it has illegally withheld from the Palestinian government, end the

occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, and enter into negotiations with the legitimately elected representatives of the Palestinian people.

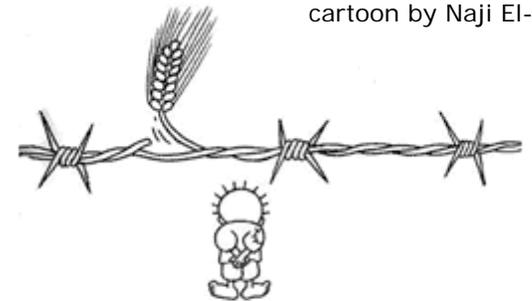
- Refuse visas to Israeli officials for travel in Canada unless and until Israel releases all Palestinian elected representatives and allows them to conduct their duties unmolested.
- Send a multi-party delegation of Canadian parliamentarians to visit the Occupied Palestinian Territories, observe the situation for themselves and report back.

This statement endorsed by CanPalNet, Jews for a Just Peace, the Palestine Community Centre of BC, StopWar.ca, the Canada Palestine Association and the Trade Union Committee for Justice in the Middle East.

Things you can do:

- Call or write to your Member of Parliament, Prime Minister, and Minister of Defense – visit webinfo.parl.gc.ca for addresses.
- Educate yourself and others. Visit www.canpalnet.ca, stopwar.ca and jewsforajustpeace.com for more information.
- Help distribute this leaflet – write support@canpalnet.ca to volunteer.

cartoon by Naji El-Ali



canpalnet

CANADA - PALESTINE SUPPORT NETWORK

We overcame our fear

Jameela al-Shanti, *The Electronic Intifada*, 9 November 2006



A Palestinian girl protests Israel's latest incursion into Gaza at a Hamas rally in the northern Gaza Strip, 3 November 2006. ([MaanImages/Wesam Saleh](#))

The unarmed women of the Gaza Strip have taken the lead in resisting Israel's latest bloody assault

Yesterday at dawn, the Israeli air force bombed and destroyed my home. I was the target, but instead the attack killed my sister-in-law, Nahla, a widow with eight children in her care. In the same raid Israel's artillery shelled a residential district in the town of Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip, leaving 19 dead and 40 injured, many killed in their beds. One family, the Athamnas, lost 16 members in the massacre: the oldest who died, Fatima, was 70; the youngest, Dima, was one; seven were children. The death toll in Beit Hanoun has passed 90 in one week.

This is Israel's tenth incursion into Beit Hanoun since it announced its withdrawal from Gaza. It has turned the town into a closed military zone, collectively punishing its 28,000 residents. For days, the town has been encircled by Israeli tanks and troops and

shelled. All water and electricity supplies were cut off and, as the death toll continued to mount, no ambulances were allowed in. Israeli soldiers raided houses, shut up the families and positioned their snipers on roofs, shooting at everything that moved. We still do not know what has become of our sons, husbands and brothers since all males over 15 years old were taken away last Thursday. They were ordered to strip to their underwear, handcuffed and led away.

It is not easy as a mother, sister or wife to watch those you love disappear before your eyes. Perhaps that was what helped me, and 1,500 other women, to overcome our fear and defy the Israeli curfew last Friday - and set about freeing some of our young men who were besieged in a mosque while defending us and our city against the Israeli military machine.

We faced the most powerful army in our region unarmed. The soldiers were loaded up with the latest weaponry, and we had nothing, except each other and our yearning for freedom. As we broke through the first barrier, we grew more confident, more determined to break the suffocating siege. The soldiers of Israel's so-called defence force did not hesitate to open fire on unarmed women. The sight of my close friends Ibtissam Yusuf abu Nada and Rajaa Ouda taking their last breaths, bathed in blood, will live with me for ever.

Later an Israeli plane shelled a bus taking children to a kindergarten. Two children were killed, along with their teacher. In the last week 30 children have died. As I go round the crowded hospital, it is deeply poignant to see the large number of small bodies with their scars and amputated limbs. We clutch our children tightly when we go to sleep, vainly hoping that we can shield them from Israel's tanks and warplanes.

But as though this occupation and collective punishment were not enough, we Palestinians

find ourselves the targets of a systematic siege imposed by the so-called free world. We are being starved and suffocated as a punishment for daring to exercise our democratic right to choose who rules and represents us. Nothing undermines the west's claims to defend freedom and democracy more than what is happening in Palestine. Shortly after announcing his project to democratise the Middle East, President Bush did all he could to strangle our nascent democracy, arresting our ministers and MPs. I have yet to hear western condemnation that I, an elected MP, have had my home demolished and relatives killed by Israel's bombs. When the bodies of my friends and colleagues were torn apart there was not one word from those who claim to be defenders of women's rights on Capitol Hill and in 10 Downing Street.

Why should we Palestinians have to accept the theft of our land, the ethnic cleansing of our people, incarcerated in forsaken refugee camps, and the denial of our most basic human rights, without protesting and resisting?

The lesson the world should learn from Beit Hanoun last week is that Palestinians will never relinquish our land, towns and villages. We will not surrender our legitimate rights for a piece of bread or handful of rice. The women of Palestine will resist this monstrous occupation imposed on us at gunpoint, siege and starvation. Our rights and those of future generations are not open for negotiation.

Whoever wants peace in Palestine and the region must direct their words and sanctions to the occupier, not the occupied, the aggressor not the victim. The truth is that the solution lies with Israel, its army and allies - not with Palestine's women and children.

Jameela al-Shanti is an elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Council for Hamas. She led a women's protest against the siege of Beit Hanoun on Friday, November 3, 2006. This article was published first in the Guardian.