



ELCIC

*In Mission
for Others*

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

302-393 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 3H6 Canada. www.elcic.ca

Toll free: 1.888.786.6707, Phone: 204.984.9150, Fax: 204.984.9185

The Right Hon. Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0A2

November 26, 2009

RE: Canada's Role in Building Peace in the Holy Land

Dear Mr. Prime Minister;

I am writing to you regarding Canada's role in building peace in the Holy Land. As a church in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), we remain deeply concerned about the continuing situation facing all people in that region. Over the past few years, a number of church delegations have visited our partners there. Another delegation is scheduled to visit in January 2010. In January 2009 along with 39 Bishops from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and five of our Bishops from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), I visited the region. Along with my colleagues, we met with leaders from Israel including the Minister of the Interior. We also met with President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and his officials. Most importantly we met with people on both sides of this conflict who are committed to building peace with security for all. It was truly an extraordinary and a personally humbling opportunity to listen to the stories of their daily life.

As part of our visit, we visited a number of projects supported by the global Lutheran community. Members of our church through Canadian Lutheran World Relief, under the umbrella of Lutheran World Service which is part of the Lutheran World Federation, support a number of these projects that have made a difference in the lives of the Palestinian people. Most notable among these has been the work of the Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. While serving "... all in need, regardless of race, religion, nationality, gender, or ability to pay, the majority of patients seen at the hospital are referrals from the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA" (LWF Information).

I want to thank you and the Government of Canada for the support you have provided through the \$610,000 grant from Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for the geriatric care ward of the Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem. It is a wonderful facility and is making a difference for many families with older members who need assistance.

Our ELCIC convention in Vancouver in June brought together delegates from the 613 congregations across the Canada. We were pleased that Bishop Mounib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land was with us. He is highly respected by leaders from all the faith communities for his efforts to bridge the divides and to help build peace. One of the significant resolutions adopted concerned peace building in the Holy Land. The ELCIC is committed to support those who are walking on the path of peace from the Israeli and Palestinian communities. We understand that this is a complex political issue and not easily addressed. We also recognize that some wish to make this a religious issue which we find problematic and not helpful to the conversations and agreements that we pray will make peace possible eventually.

I have attached a copy of the resolution for your information. As you will see, there are a range of actions to which we as a church have committed ourselves. Likewise, there are a number of actions that we are asking your government to support. Many of these your government and previous governments are on record as supporting. Among those policies that I have been asked to communicate our denominations' support are the following:

- “ELCIC support for “the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, including the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel” (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Policy);
- ELCIC support for a secure state of Israel and a viable state for Palestinians, including a contiguous West Bank;
- ELCIC encouragement to undertake further measures to reduce poverty, unemployment and improve service for Palestinians and express appreciation for funding for such services as the Gerontology Unit at Augusta Victoria Hospital; and
- ELCIC’s support for an end to terrorism and violence by individuals, organizations and states against innocent civilians and bringing to justice those who commit such crimes.”

(From ELCIC Resolution #NC-09-09)

Nevertheless, we believe that at this juncture in the political process, it is important to clearly reaffirm Canada’s position particularly with some new political actors being recently elected. On these points I would like to support Canada’s stated position and ask some questions concerning the future direction for the implementation of Canada’s policy. Below are areas we support and some questions regarding how you plan to pursue these objectives.

Building Peace

The ELCIC is calling on your government to “Renew its efforts to play a more active, constructive, and balanced role in creating the conditions for peace in the Holy Land;”

Our Question

How is Canada currently engaged in creating conditions for peace?

The Occupation and Expropriation of Land

The ELCIC is calling on your government to:

- (1) “Reiterate to the Government of Israel, Canada’s continued opposition to the occupation of territories (Golan Heights, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank) as called for in UN Security Council Resolutions 446 and 465;”
- (2) “Reiterate to the Government of Israel, Canada’s position that Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are in violation of the *Fourth Geneva Convention* and call for a cessation of all settlement activities and a withdrawal from settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory to the 1967 armistice boundary (the “Green Line”);”
- (3) “Reiterate to the Government of Israel, that while Israel has a right to assure its own security, Canada’s position is that the presence of the “Security Wall” as it has been constructed on Palestinian lands is contrary to international law under the *Fourth Geneva Convention* and that Canada is strongly opposed to Israel’s illegal “expropriations and the demolition of houses and economic infrastructure carried out for this purpose.”(Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade);”

Our Questions

Has the Government of Canada communicated to the recently elected Government of Israel its opposition to the “occupation of territories,” for the cessation of all settlement activities and for the withdrawal to the 1967 armistice boundary? Similarly how has Canada expressed its opposition to the illegality of the “Security Wall” and the illegal expropriations of Palestinians lands?

Respect for Human Rights

The ELCIC is calling on your government to:

- (4) “Call upon all governments in the region to fully respect human rights and international humanitarian law;”
- (5) “Continue to condemn all attacks on civilians including suicide bombings, targeted assassinations and military attacks in/from populated areas which are known beforehand to likely result in civilian deaths;”

Our Questions

How is Canada monitoring human rights violations on all sides of this dispute? What is Canada’s response to the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, led by Justice Richard Goldstone?

Bilateral Agreements

The ELCIC is calling on your government to:

- (6) “Reiterate to the Government of Israel Canada’s commitment to a negotiated, final status agreement, which includes a “shared Jerusalem” that can serve as a capital to both Palestine and Israel, with full access to religious sites and full rights in the city for Jews, Christians, and Muslims;
- (7) Review the *Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement* to insure that Palestinian producers have access to Canadian markets and that Canadian Trade Policy does not legitimate Israel’s tacit annexation of the occupied Palestinian territories;
- (8) Insure that in implementing trade agreements human rights are promoted and protected and safeguards put into law to preserve the environment;
- (9) And Support aid and policies that promote Canadian private investment for building Palestinian economic capacity.”

Our Questions

How is Canada supporting the negotiation process for a final settlement agreement with a “shared Jerusalem as the capital of both Israel and Palestine?” Will your government review the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement to insure that Palestinian producers have access to Canadian markets and that the Agreement does not enable the legitimating of any annexation of occupied Palestinian lands? How are you ensuring that human rights and environmental protection are safeguarded in this agreement? Will your government be increasing aid to the Palestinians and with what priorities? Lastly, how are you encouraging and supporting Canadian businesses in making investments particularly in the West Bank and Gaza?

We do believe that Canada can play a constructive role in building peace in what seems an irreconcilable situation at times. We pledge to do our part in this process. Please be assured of our prayers for your work on our behalf.

Yours in Christ,



The Rev. Susan C. Johnson
National Bishop

cc The Hon. Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Opposition, Liberal Party of Canada
 The Hon. Jack Layton, Leader of New Democratic Party
 The Hon. Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois