

Open Letter: Civil society coalition urges Canada to stop arms transfers to Israel

February 5th, 2024

The Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.,
Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Global Affairs Canada,
125 Sussex Drive,
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0G2

Dear Minister Joly,

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, have profound concerns about the legal and humanitarian implications of Canada's transfer of weapon systems to the government of Israel. These concerns have only been amplified following the [January 26th](#) provisional ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Since the onset of Israel's response to the Hamas-led October 7 attacks, more than [26,000](#) Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, the majority civilians, including over [10,000 children](#). Large parts of the Gaza Strip have suffered wholesale devastation, including the widespread destruction of homes, schools, hospitals, refugee camps and critical civilian infrastructure. Experts have concluded that Israel's bombing campaign is now amongst the "[deadliest and most destructive in recent history](#)."

According to annual datasets published by Global Affairs Canada, over the last decade, Canada has exported more than \$140-million (constant CAD) in military goods to Israel, including military aerospace components as well as bombs, missiles, explosives and associated parts. There is substantial concern that some of these weapons could be enabling Israel's operation in Gaza. In addition to direct exports, Canadian-produced technology has also been supplied to Israel by first being integrated into US-produced systems, including components incorporated into the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, which Israel has used in its bombing campaign across Gaza.

Credible human rights monitors, including UN officials, have routinely alleged that Israel has violated [international humanitarian and human rights law](#) throughout its operation. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has likened the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza to the "[collective punishment](#) of the Palestinian people." Given Israel's conduct during its ongoing

military operation in Gaza, there is clear and substantial risk that Canadian arms transfers may be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law or international human rights law in the conflict. As per Canada's obligations under the Export and Import Permits Act and the Arms Trade Treaty, Canadian officials are therefore required to halt arms transfers and deny further arms export and brokering authorizations to Israel.

The January 26th provisional ruling by the ICJ deemed that at least some of South Africa's allegations of violations of rights of Palestinians under the Genocide Convention are "plausible." This is a further reason for Canada to halt arms transfers to Israel. All parties to the Genocide Convention, including Canada, have duties to ensure the prevention and non-complicity in one of the most serious internationally wrongful acts. Countries that transfer arms to another country that are likely to be used in the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide risk being complicit in those crimes.

In December, the government of Canada joined an overwhelming majority of UN member states in calling for a [ceasefire](#). Civil society welcomed such a call. Now, towards this effort of ending the grave abuses taking place on the ground, Canada must meet its domestic and international obligations by halting the supply of weapon systems to Israel.

In recent years, Canadian officials have taken the proactive step to presumptively deny the issuance of arms export and brokering permits to certain countries when there was a substantial risk those weapons would be misused—including, at times, to [Türkiye](#), [Belarus](#), and [Russia](#). Dozens more individual arms export permits have been denied since Canada's accession to the ATT due to the risks posed by their proposed export. Given the wholesale destruction in Gaza and the deaths of thousands of Palestinian civilians, there is no reason a similar policy cannot or should not be implemented in regards to Israel.

This call echoes that of [leading Canadian and global humanitarian organizations](#) urging for a cessation of arms transfers to Israel and Palestinian armed groups in order to protect civilians and allow Gaza's only remaining lifeline, an internationally funded humanitarian aid response, to reach the 2.3 million in need.

Minister, we welcome Canada's announced strong support for the "[critical role](#)" of the ICJ and commitment to abide by its rulings in the genocide case brought by South Africa against Israel. However, the government of Canada cannot at the same time signal support for the ICJ, and adherence to its rulings, while continuing to arm those whom the ICJ has ruled are plausibly accused of genocide. We therefore urge immediate action on the part of your government by halting further arms exports, alongside export and brokering authorizations, to Israel.

Sincerely,

Above Ground, a project of MakeWay

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights

Amnesty International Canadian Section (English speaking)
Amnistie internationale Canada francophone
Anglican Church of Canada
Canadian Boat to Gaza
Canadian Council of Muslim Women
Canadian Friends of Sabeel
Canadian Memorial United Church
Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council (CMPAC)
Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME)
CJPME Saskatoon Chapter
Development and Peace – Caritas Canada
Doctors of the World Canada / Médecins du Monde Canada
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Human Concern International
Human Rights Watch
Humanity & Inclusion Canada
Independent Jewish Voices Canada
Just Peace Advocates
KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
Labour Against the Arms Trade
London Chapter, Council of Canadians
Mennonite Central Committee Canada
Mennonite Church Canada Palestine-Israel Network
New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity
Ontario Palestinian Rights Association
Ottawa Food Bank
Oxfam Canada
Oxfam-Québec
Palestinian and Jewish Unity (PAJU)
Peace Brigades International – Canada

People for Peace, London

Primate's World Relief and Development Fund

Project Ploughshares

Regina Peace Council

Rideau Institute on International Affairs

Right On Canada

Save the Children Canada

Social Rights Advocacy Centre

The United Church of Canada

United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel (UNJPPI)

WILPF Canada

Women's Centre for Social Justice [WomenatthecentrE]

World BEYOND War Canada