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CANADIAN VOICE OF WOMEN FOR PEACE

May 16, 2021

Hon. Justin Trudeau, MP
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Re: To end the violence in Gaza and the West Bank, cease all arms exports and commercial contracts with Israel and support women's efforts for peace

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

The Canadian Voice of Women (VOW) condemns the Government of Canada's refusal to expressly denounce the State of Israel's violence against Palestinians in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. The Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs Marc Garneau issued on May 12 and his social media posts on May 15, failed to acknowledge the violent and illegal actions committed by the Israeli police, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Israeli settlers against the Palestinian people. Minister Garneau's statement and tweets do not mention Israel's violence against Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque and its ongoing, brutal occupation of Palestinian territory. Though the statement does mention the home demolitions and evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, it does not explain that it is Palestinians who are losing their homes and does not criticize Israel for these illegal actions.

In recognition of the 73rd anniversary of the Nakba, VOW writes this statement to express our solidarity and support for Palestinian human rights and for a just peace in the Middle East. Last week, more than 300 Palestinians were injured after Israeli police stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque. VOW notes that since the beginning of this year, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has reported that Israeli authorities have demolished or seized at least 292 Palestinian-owned structures across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, displacing 450 people, including 246 children.

VOW is deeply saddened by the news of people who have been injured or killed over this past week. Israeli's air strikes have killed almost 200 Palestinians, including 58 children and 34 women. In Israel, seven people have been killed including a child by Hamas' rockets. VOW is opposed to the use of force and all forms of violence. Yet, we

Canadian Voice of Women for Peace founded in 1960.
A national & international network of women working to help
build a world founded on peace and justice for all.

Consultative Status with the
United Nations – ECOSOC
Economic & Social Council

Honourary Board Members:

Jean Augustine, Kim Phuc, Judy Rebick, Metta Spencer, Mary Wynne-Ashford and LeeAnn McKenna

know that Israel is the 14th highest for military spending in the world and spends annually \$21 billion for its highly advanced army that is supported by \$3.8 billion in US military aid. Israel has pounded Gaza with laser guided bombs that have destroyed homes, schools, media outlets, medical facilities and civilian infrastructure, which are war crimes. Hamas does not have a military, but some rockets, which were largely disabled by Israel's missile defense system before reaching Israel. The Palestinians in Gaza who are legitimately represented by the government of Hamas do not have a functioning state, but live in an "open air prison" with limited electricity and inadequate social services because of the harsh, illegal blockade by Israel.

To help end the ongoing violence, VOW calls on the Canadian government to immediately cease all arms exports to Israel. Every year, Canada permits millions of dollars' worth of exports of weapons including automatic rifles and carbines to the Israeli security forces that are used against Palestinians.

VOW also calls on the federal government to cancel all subsidies and contracts with Israeli companies. VOW is appealing to federal Minister of Transportation Omar Alghabra to cancel the \$36.16 million contract for drone technology from Elbit Systems, Israel's largest weapons company. Last December, the federal government announced it would purchase a "civilian" version of Elbit's lethal military drone, the same one that is used to kill Palestinians. VOW is very concerned that these contracts and partnerships with Israeli companies for intrusive security, defence and surveillance technologies make Canada complicit in the ongoing illegal Israeli occupation and violations of Palestinian human rights.

As well, Canada's Budget 2021 proposed funding of \$10 million over five years to expand opportunities for Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to engage in research and development partnerships with Israeli SMEs as part of the Canadian International Innovation Program. The Government of Canada should not subsidize and engage in commercial relations with Israeli companies. As B'Tselem and Human Rights Watch have determined, Israel is an apartheid state. To end Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, VOW supports the nonviolent program of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel.

Furthermore, the federal government should also abide by its own domestic laws and not support Canadians serving in the IDF. Canada's *Foreign Enlistment Act* makes it illegal to induce or recruit for a foreign military. Canada Revenue Agency's guidelines state that "supporting the armed forces of another country is not" a charitable activity. The federal government should ensure that these legal requirements are followed.

VOW is also calling on the federal government to immediately increase aid and assistance to Gaza and to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA is the organisation that runs schools and provides health services as well as other humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees. Last year, Minister of International Development Karina Gould announced a Canadian pledge of \$90 million over three years to UNRWA, but this is not enough. Canada must

dramatically increase funding to help rebuild Palestinian communities in Gaza and the West Bank and to provide desperately needed services to Palestinian refugees.

VOW joins the international community in calling for a ceasefire and an end to Israel's blockade of Gaza and its illegal occupation of Palestinian territory. At this time, we recall the important work of *Women Wage Peace*, the grassroots organization comprised of tens of thousands of Palestinian and Israeli women. *Women Wage Peace* is a broad, politically unaffiliated movement, which is acting to prevent war and to promote a non-violent, respectful, and mutually accepted peace deal. *Women Wage Peace* have organized many actions for peace and they are calling for the adherence to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. We acknowledge their crucial work for a viable peace agreement that raises women's voices and helps to end the conflict.

Sincerely,

Lyn Adamson & Hannah Hadikin
Co-Chairs
National Board

cc:

Omar Alghabra, Minister of Transportation
Erin O'Toole, leader of the Conservative Party
Jagmeet Singh, leader of the New Democratic Party
Annamie Paul, leader of the Green Party

The Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (VOW) was established in 1960 and is a non-partisan, non-governmental organization comprised of a network of diverse women across the country. VOW has consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and every year takes a delegation of women to the UN Commission on the Status of Women conference in New York. For almost 60 years, VOW has tirelessly advocated for a world without war. VOW stands for a feminist peace based on nonviolence, disarmament, diplomacy and common security with gender equality. For more information about VOW, please visit: <http://vowpeace.org>

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