

March 18, 2021

The Hon. Marc Garneau, P.C., M.P.
Minister for Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Marc.Garneau@parl.gc.ca
Marc.Garneau@international.gc.ca

The Hon. Karina Gould, P.C., M.P.
Minister for International Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Karina.Gould@parl.gc.ca
Karina.Gould@international.gc.ca

Dear Ministers Garneau and Gould,

Greetings to you from Mennonite Central Committee Canada.

On November 19, 2020, MCC, along with leaders of Canadian churches, church agencies and networks, wrote to your offices (including your predecessor, then Foreign Affairs Minister, the Hon. Phillip-Francois Champagne) calling for sustainable funding for UNRWA. Then on December 21, the Canadian Government pledged an additional \$90 million over three years. We at MCC note our gratitude and appreciation for this announcement.

Canada's new commitment will enable UNRWA to address some of the most urgent basic needs in health and education of some of the more vulnerable among the over 5 million Palestinian refugees in the coming months and years, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), and Palestinian refugees throughout the region, including in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

For over a century, MCC has responded to the needs of the most vulnerable in Canada and around the world. We work through local community partners and faith-based groups in over 50 countries, based on a belief in peacebuilding, human dignity and right relationships between all peoples. MCC began its work in the Middle East in 1949, responding to the urgent needs of Palestinian refugees in Jordan and what is now the West Bank. Since then, MCC's work has expanded into other parts of the Middle East including in Lebanon and Syria, among other countries. MCC supports diverse local organizations and agencies and in each of these countries, MCC supports several organizations that work with Palestinian refugees. These partners inform our understanding of local contexts and our advocacy with government.

In the West Bank and Gaza, MCC supports local partners that work with children and children's groups located in UNRWA refugee camps. These local organizations seek to fill critical gaps in the growth and development of children living in precarious circumstances, building hope for future generations. For example, approximately

70% of Gaza's population are refugees, registered under UNRWA and all of Gaza is under a military blockade. In Gaza, MCC partners with the [Cultural and Free Thought Association](#) (CFTA), which also runs after-school and activities such as dance, photography, painting, music, poetry, and education.

In southern Lebanon, MCC supports [Popular Aid for Relief and Development](#) (PARD), an organization that works with Palestinian refugees inside and outside of UNRWA camps. PARD supports programming in food, health, education and protection – including trainings and support for trauma and psychological health. Within just a couple of days of the devastating blast in Beirut – in the midst of COVID-19 – PARD had sent out their staff to the area around the blast site, to respond to immediate and urgent needs.

In the context of COVID-19, these partners, and others around the region, have continued their essential work and found innovative ways to connect with children and families online and at a distance.

Based on what we hear from these organizations around the needs of refugees, we appreciate this timely response by the Government of Canada. With this contribution, Canada is well positioned to also take concrete actions to address structural and systemic barriers to sustainable solutions and self-determination for Palestinian refugees across the region. These actions will strengthen Canada's engagement in the region. We encourage Canada to continue its leadership by using all available political and diplomatic measures to work for the end the Israeli occupation, in accordance with Canada's own foreign policy regarding Israel-Palestine, and with international law. This includes partnering with and supporting local civil society organizations that are working for change, and a just peace for all, from the ground up.

We look forward to continued engagement with the government of Canada around further places where Canada can play a leadership role for a just peace for all in the region, especially for Palestinian refugees. We are committed to supporting Canada's positive engagement in the region and would be eager to meet with you to provide more ideas and opportunities where Canada can fulfill this role.

We also keep you both in our prayers as you manage these important and complex files.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Bauman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rick Cober Bauman
Executive Director, Mennonite Central Committee Canada

CC:

The Right Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, P.C., M.P., Liberal Party
Mr. Robert Oliphant, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Liberal Party
Ms. Kamal Khera, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Liberal Party

The Hon. Erin O'Toole, Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, Conservative Party
The Hon. Michael Chong, Official Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs, Conservative Party
Mr. Garnett Genuis, Official Opposition Critic for International Development and Human Rights, Conservative Party

M. Yves-Francois Blanchet, Leader, Bloc Québécois
M. Stéphane Bergeron, Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs, Bloc Québécois
M. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe, Opposition Critic for International Cooperation and La Francophonie, Bloc Québécois

Mr. Jagmeet Singh, Leader, New Democratic Party
Mr. Jack Harris, Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs, New Democratic Party
Ms. Heather McPherson, Opposition Critic for International Development, New Democratic Party

Ms. Annamie Paul, Leader, Green Party of Canada
Mr. Paul Manly, M.P., Nanaimo—Ladysmith, Green Party of Canada