

6 December 2018

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

Honourable Chrystia Freeland  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

I am writing on behalf of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada, an organization of Anabaptist churches that works on relief, development and peace worldwide, to express our appreciation for the Canadian government's recent decision to contribute up to \$50 million over the next two years to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for health and education efforts. Along with thanks, I would also encourage the government to act to address the root causes of suffering in the region, specifically in Gaza.

I, along with other members of MCC leadership, recently returned from a learning visit to Palestine and Israel, where we were able to witness firsthand the current work of MCC local partners. MCC began working in the region in 1949 in response to the refugee crisis created during the Arab-Israeli war. Today, MCC local partners tell us that Palestinian refugees, especially those in Gaza, are among the poorest and most vulnerable in the Middle East. Given our longstanding experience in the region, we were greatly encouraged by the Government of Canada's decision in 2016 to reinstate \$25 million in annual funding to UNRWA and we are also glad to see this most recent contribution, on top of the \$10 million added in March.

During our visit, we saw and heard that providing steady access to emergency services, health care, and education for children, women, and men devastated by violence, displacement, and social upheaval builds resilience. It also helps ensure that those dealing with trauma—particularly youth—are not at risk of being drawn into further cycles of violence. We were not able to visit Gaza, but we heard, via partners, about the more than one million people in Gaza who rely on humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs. Reports are emerging of a collapsing health sector and growing hunger. For this reason, we thank the Government of Canada for its recent funding announcement to alleviate some of these immediate concerns.

We also heard from local partners that the situation continues to look bleak. The continued construction of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank – an area we were able to visit – leads to increased instability and tensions that funding alone cannot alleviate. As well, the blockade on Gaza that Israel imposed in 2007 has devastated the economy and brought unspeakable hardship for Palestinians in the area. Increased humanitarian aid is an important step forward but dealing [with the root causes](#) of the Gazan crisis by lifting the blockade is crucial in ensuring that Palestinians are able to have a sustainable future.

As an organization dedicated to realizing peace and justice around the world, MCC will continue to support our local partners who tirelessly work to address the humanitarian needs of vulnerable Palestinian refugees across the region. For this work to build a truly sustainable future, however, we believe that robust international efforts towards a just and peaceful resolution of existing conflicts throughout the Middle East are urgently needed. Although I welcome, support and thank the government for the recent provision of urgent humanitarian aid for vulnerable Palestinians, including those in Gaza, I also urge the government of Canada to support an end to the Israeli blockade on Gaza and encourage the creation of conditions for a sustainable peace that fall in line with international laws. This action falls in line with Canada's commitment to promote the human rights of all people, including Palestinians and Israelis and is the only way to fully support the thriving of all living in the region.

Sincerely,



Paul Gilbert  
MCC Canada Board Chair



Rick Cober Bauman  
MCC Canada executive director

Cc:

Hon. Andrew Scheer, Leader, Official Opposition, Conservative Party

Guy Caron, Parliamentary Leader of the New Democratic Party

Elizabeth May, Leader, Green Party

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau, P.C., M.P. Minister for International Development and La Francophonie

Kamal Khera, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development

Hon. Andrew Leslie, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Hon. Erin O'Toole, Foreign Affairs Critic, Conservative Party

Hélène Laverdière, Foreign Affairs Critic, New Democratic Party

Ziad Aboultaif, International Development Critic, Conservative Party

Linda Francis Duncan, International Development Critic, New Democratic Party