

Canada's callous indifference to human suffering in Gaza

Richard Dufour
18 August 2014

In a display of sheer indifference to the fate of civilians bearing the brunt of Israel's military siege of Gaza, the Canadian government rejected last week a proposal to bring 100 badly wounded Gaza children to Canada for medical treatment.

The decision to bury the proposal was made by the federal Conservative government of Stephen Harper after several hospitals in Ontario had volunteered to take the children with the stated support of Ontario's provincial government. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Adam Hodge cited in an email the need of the victims to "receive the medical support they need close to their families" and to avoid "the medical risks and dangers of being transported overseas."

This threadbare pretext for inaction was quickly exposed in the rest of the email. Echoing the official Canadian line of support for the Zionist state's attempt to bomb the Palestinian people into submission, Hodge wrote, "There is only one party responsible for the suffering of the Palestinian people, and that is the international terrorist group Hamas."

Turning reality on its head, in a transparent attempt at covering up Israel's war crimes in Gaza, Hodge continued, "Hamas's reckless aggression continues to put Palestinian lives at risk by impeding the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza."

There are in fact numerous reports of Israeli strikes specifically aimed at health facilities since the beginning of the conflict. Dr. Bashar Murad, director of the emergency and ambulance unit of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, recently stated, "Our ambulances are often targeted although they are clearly marked and display all signs that they are ambulances."

This was confirmed by Philip Luther, Amnesty International Middle East and North Africa Director, who referred to the "harrowing descriptions by

ambulance drivers and other medics of the utterly impossible situation in which they have to work, with bombs and bullets killing or injuring their colleagues as they try to save lives." Luther added that there is "mounting evidence that the Israeli army has targeted health facilities or professionals."

According to an Amnesty International briefing dated August 7, "Hospitals across Gaza suffer from fuel and power shortages (worsened by the Israeli attack on Gaza's only power plant on 29 July), inadequate water supply, and shortages of essential drugs and medical equipment. The situation was acute before the current hostilities due to Israel's seven-year blockade of Gaza, but has been seriously exacerbated since."

In his email, Hodge cited another reason to justify Canada's refusal to come to the aid of badly wounded children from the war-ravaged Gaza Strip. Ottawa, he wrote, is exploring options "on how best to deploy Canadian medical expertise, financing and matériel to support victims of Hamas on the ground."

How can one pack so many lies in so few words? Victims of indiscriminate Israeli bombardment of a densely populated urban area half the size of Toronto are turned into "victims of Hamas." As for the claim that Canada wants to provide help "on the ground," this too was exposed as a lie.

Tarek Loubani, a physician based in London, Ontario, was recently denied entry to the Gaza Strip where he was to assist as a trauma and emergency specialist. Despite his travel documentation being in order, he was expelled after being strip-searched and escorted by Israeli police. Before departing for Tel Aviv, he asked for assistance from Ottawa. "An official at the Department of Foreign Affairs," Loubani recounts in a comment published August 12 in the *Toronto Star*, "responded to me directly by email that 'neither we in

Ottawa nor the Canadian Embassy in Tel Aviv can assist in facilitating the entry of Canadians into the Gaza Strip.”

Turning a blind eye to the child and other civilian victims of the Israeli assault on Gaza, Ottawa is continuing its role as an enthusiastic defender of the criminal actions carried out by the US-backed Zionist state in the Middle East to secure its position as a bulwark of Western imperialist interests in the region.

In response to ceasefire negotiations currently taking place in Cairo, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird recently tweeted, “ Hamas must immediately disarm.” This parrots one of the hardline demands being made by Israel in Cairo as it insists on maintaining ghetto-like conditions on Gaza.

Baird has also condemned the United Nations for its choice of William Schabas, Canadian international law expert and Officer of the Order of Canada, to lead an investigation into potential war crimes in the Israel-Gaza conflict. “UN Human Rights Council continues to be a sham for advancing human rights,” Baird tweeted last Monday.

What makes Schabas unfit for such a position, in the eyes of Baird and the Zionists, is a 2013 speech in which Schabas courageously stated the obvious—that “international law can be used to demonstrate and underscore the violations committed by the state of Israel, and moreover can be used to hold accountable individuals who have perpetrated international crimes against the people of Palestine.”

The pro-Israeli stand taken by Stephen Harper’s Conservatives has been embraced by the entire Canadian political establishment, including by so-called “progressive” parties such as the New Democratic Party and the Green Party of Canada.

The social-democratic NDP’s endorsement of the Israeli assault on Gaza has been so open—with an infamous statement by party leader Thomas Mulcair that “ Hamas is a recognised terrorist organisation and Israel has the right to defend its citizens from these attacks”—that it has created internal frictions, including a so-called “die-in” protest last week by party supporters in front of Mulcair’s office in Montreal.

Mulcair responded with an opinion piece published in last Sunday’s *Toronto Star*. He started by paying lip service to platitudes such as supporting “peaceful coexistence in viable, independent states with agreed-

upon borders,” wishing for “an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian land” and advocating “an end to violence targeting civilians.” He then moved on to his main point.

“During the current conflict in Gaza,” Mulcair wrote defiantly, “we have criticized the indiscriminate rocket fire and breaking of ceasefires by Hamas—and have been clear that Israel, like all countries, has the right to defend itself from attacks.”

A similar situation has emerged in the Green Party of Canada. In an article published on August 2 in the *National Post*, party leader Elizabeth May called on all Canadian political parties “to condemn Hamas as a terrorist organization and to demand that it stops sending rockets into Israel.” She insisted that “ Hamas is to blame for provocation” and made clear that she “defends the right of the State of Israel to exist.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)