

Canada backs Israel's crusade to dismantle UN Relief Agency for Palestinian Refugees

Our reporter
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Canada's Liberal government was among the first to suspend payments to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) last Friday, after Israel went public with allegations that a handful of its employees were involved in the Hamas-led Oct. 7 uprising against the suppression and dispossession of the Palestinian people.

The decision to suspend all funding to the agency that is at the centre of the humanitarian efforts to prevent the people of Gaza from dying from starvation, dehydration and disease is not only callous. It is supportive of the efforts of Israel's far-right Benjamin Netanyahu-led government to rid the Gaza Strip of Palestinians through slaughter and ethnic cleansing, and is in keeping with Canadian imperialism's fulsome support for Israel's genocidal assault, which has already resulted in over 30,000 fatalities.

The Israeli charge that 12 of UNRWA's 13,000 employees were involved in massacres and kidnappings on October 7 was a provocation, carefully timed to deflect attention away from the International Court of Justice's interim ruling on the genocide case South Africa has brought against Israel. To the chagrin and discomfort of Netanyahu and his government, the ICJ found that South Africa had presented compelling evidence of both genocidal acts and genocidal intent on the part of Israeli government and military leaders and that the case should go forward. However, ceding to pressure from the US, Canada and the other imperialist powers, the court scandalously failed to call on Israel to cease its now almost four-month-long bombardment of Gaza and blockade of food, medicine, energy and other essentials.

Initially, Israel said that its "information" about the 12 was the result of its interrogation, i.e., torture, of captured "militants." Later it changed its story, stating that intelligence services had monitored their cell phones.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini responded by firing nine workers, including seven who worked as teachers at UNRWA schools. One of the accused is presumed dead, while another two are being sought.

The US, followed soon after by Canada, and subsequently by Australia and all the leading European imperialist powers seized on the Israeli charges to announce they were suspending all funding to UNRWA. "Canada," declared Minister for

International Development Ahmed Hussen, "is taking these reports extremely seriously and is engaging closely with UNRWA and other donors on this issue."

While Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government take "extremely seriously" unproven allegations against a minuscule number of UNRWA employees, earlier this month they dismissed out of hand South Africa's extensively documented charge of genocide against Israel. The presentation to the ICJ included numerous statements of genocidal intent by Israeli political leaders and documentation of the indiscriminate slaughter of the people of Gaza, the vast majority of them women and children.

This stark contrast flows from the fact that Canadian imperialism is an enabler of the Israeli genocide. Apart from the United States, Canada has been Israel's strongest supporter among major powers at the UN for well over a decade. It has voted repeatedly against UN resolutions condemning Israel's brutal treatment of the Palestinians, including its illegal settlement policy in the West Bank, and supplied tens of millions of dollars in equipment to the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) each year.

To top off the Canadian government's cynicism, Hussen made a second statement on Tuesday claiming that Ottawa will provide \$40 million in humanitarian aid for the people of Gaza. However, he provided no specifics on how this aid will actually reach them, given its refusal to work with UNRWA.

Stephen Harper's Conservative government cut off all funding for UNRWA, the agency that since 1949 has provided support to the successive waves of Palestinian refugees created by Israel's imperialist-backed wars. But the Trudeau government, as part of its efforts to expand Canada's influence in the Middle East and Africa, restored it in 2016, and in recent years Canada has been providing UNRWA with \$30 million or more in aid annually.

Canada and the other imperialist powers' suspension of funding for UNRWA will quickly bring its operations to a halt, as they are the source of well over 60 percent of its funding and the Gaza war has already strained its operations to a breaking point.

It will, and is meant to, assist Israel both politically and materially in the pursuit of its genocidal assault on Gaza.

In addition to supplying aid itself, UNRWA has coordinated the distribution of food, water, and health care by other humanitarian groups in Gaza.

Now UNRWA representatives are warning that it is at the very most a matter of a few weeks before they have to cease all their activities, meaning shortages of all basic necessities and the accompanying dangers of starvation and disease will grow rapidly.

This, in turn, will facilitate the efforts of Israel's government to ethnically cleanse Gaza of Palestinians to make way for Israeli settlements, as openly advocated at a "Victory of Israel—Settlement Brings Security" conference attended by 11 members of Netanyahu's cabinet last Sunday.

Abolishing the UNRWA, it need be noted, has long been a goal of the Israeli right, and in this it received support from former US President Donald Trump, when the would-be dictator was in the White House.

The Liberal government's endorsement of this agenda is inseparable from its major role in US imperialism's wars around the world, which are coalescing into a third world war for the redivision of the globe. Canada is involved in Washington's deliberate escalation of the war throughout the Middle East, having joined the coalition along with Britain and Australia that began bombing Yemen earlier this month. Ottawa is also a key player in the US-NATO war on Russia in Ukraine. Over 1,000 Canadian troops are currently participating in NATO's massive mobilization of some 90,000 troops in an exercise across the Baltic and Eastern Europe that is meant to threaten and prepare for war with Russia.

Canada's official opposition Conservatives have repeatedly criticized the Trudeau government from the standpoint that it is not supportive enough of Israel. Thus Pierre Poilievre, the Conservatives' far-right leader, denounced Trudeau as a "terrorist" accomplice for only "suspending" UNRWA funding and not halting it for good. Echoing the propaganda of Netanyahu and the Israel Defence Forces, Poilievre declared, "Trudeau should be ashamed of himself for the way he spent our money to fund this terrorist organization."

Similarly, Poilievre has attacked the Trudeau government for its hypocritical calls for a "humanitarian pause" in the onslaught on Gaza, saying nothing should be allowed to stand in the ways of Israel's "just war." He has also chided it for not having immediately dispatched warships and warplanes to join in the attack on Yemen.

Quebec's right-wing Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) has also repeatedly attacked the Trudeau government for calling for "humanitarian pauses" in Gaza. Yesterday it further elaborated on its position, saying it does not support any halt to the fighting in Gaza until "the capitulation of Hamas." Quebec Premier Francois Legault's government, which has spent recent weeks working to impose massive concessions on 600,000 public sector workers, defined this as Hamas releasing all its hostages and surrendering all its weapons, effectively the

terms demanded by the Netanyahu regime to declare victory.

The trade union-sponsored New Democratic Party, which has pledged to keep Trudeau's minority government in office through June 2025, made a show of distancing itself from the UNRWA decision. Heather McPherson, the NDP's foreign affairs spokesperson, stated, "Investigations must proceed, but this punishes the starving people of Gaza who need a ceasefire and for whom UNRWA is one of their only sources of help."

Such hand-wringing deserves nothing but scorn. McPherson's party props up a government that has, in lockstep with its US ally, bitterly opposed calls for a halt to Israel's bombardment of Gaza ever since the war began. McPherson and the NDP have shown no compunction about backing Ottawa's reckless escalation of the war in Ukraine through the supplying of billions of dollars in military and financial aid. Estimates suggest that upwards of 500,000 Ukrainian soldiers and tens of thousands of Russians have been slaughtered in the now almost two-year-long war.

Moreover, the New Democrats have demonstrated their unyielding support for Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land over recent years. From blocking pro-Palestine candidates from running for the party in elections, to suppressing discussion of resolutions critical of Israel at its conventions, the NDP has demonstrated to the ruling elite its steadfast commitment to imperialism's most important ally in the Middle East.

Since October 7, the NDP has facilitated the witch-hunt of pro-Palestine protesters that the Trudeau government has helped spearhead. In the early days of the slaughter, the Ontario NDP threw Sarah Jama, a member of Ontario's legislature, out of the party caucus for her condemnation of Israel as an "apartheid state" and refusal to condemn the Oct. 7 uprising.

In the face of the unanimous support within the Canadian political establishment for Israel's genocide, the only social force capable of putting an end to the mass slaughter is the Canadian and international working class. The hundreds of thousands who have joined repeated demonstrations against the horror unfolding in Gaza must turn to the working class, fighting to mobilize it in an international political general strike to bring the imperialist powers behind Israel's bloodbath to their knees. The struggle must have as its aim the ending of the capitalist profit system that gives rise to war, and its replacement with a socialist society.



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