

THE CRISIS IN GAZA

Thursday, February 5, 2009

In recent weeks Canadians have been watching events unfold in Gaza with increasing concern. The terrible loss of civilian life, and deprivation caused by both military action and the ongoing blockade, are unacceptable.

While we do not condone the tactics of Hamas, it is clear that the actions of Israel constitute gross violations of the human rights of the Palestinians. These include the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure and UN facilities, as well as attacks on public services can only have the purpose of inflicting even greater suffering on the people of Gaza.

The fourth Geneva Convention obliges an occupying power to protect the civilian population under its occupation, including the provision of basic services such as food and medicines.

The Canadian Labour Congress has called for a peace process that is based on United Nations resolutions and international law. We also need to challenge our own government, whose policies under Stephen Harper have lost any semblance of balance or fairness. Canada needs to restore its reputation as a peacemaker on the global stage. We call on the Canadian government to take the following steps:

- Demand an immediate cessation of hostilities by both parties accompanied by the resumption of a meaningful peace process – a solution to the crisis will only come from a negotiated settlement built on the foundation of existing UN resolutions including Resolutions 242 and 338,
- Demand an end to the economic blockade of Palestine so as to allow the people to build a sustainable and secure future – help them end the cycle of violence through freedom, security and prosperity. This includes urging Israel to reopen the border crossings to allow essential aid to reach the 1.5 million people of Gaza who have been suffering under the year long blockade; and
- Immediately start shipments from Canada of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people and providing greater financial support for the reconstruction of basic infrastructure.

In addition, the Canadian government should embark on a broad foreign policy consultation with Canadians and civil society organizations to ensure Canada has an independent and principled policy on foreign affairs. That foreign policy must be premised on the values and strengths of Canadians – solidarity, compassion and a commitment to peace.