

June 28, 2009

Open Letter to Margaret MacDiarmid, B.C. Minister of Education

Dear Minister:

I am a survivor of the Nakba (the Palestinian Catastrophe). My parents were forced out of Jaffa, Palestine in 1948 by Zionist terrorist gangs while my mother was still pregnant with me. My parents and many others were part of the one third of the Palestinian people who became refugees before the establishment of the state of Israel. This happened under the watch of the British mandate and its troops who were in Palestine to “civilize” the Palestinian people.

I was shocked, hurt and outraged by your action of removing an exam question relating to the dispossession of my people.

<http://www.vancouversun.com/Ministry+removes+controversial+Middle+East+question+from+history+exam/1728437/story.html>

It is clear that your action came as a result of pressure from the “Canadian Jewish Congress” that claimed, “all three sentences are misleading and historically inaccurate” without specifying or attempting to clarify why.

Let us look at the exam question: “They have been fighting to regain a homeland since they were driven out in 1948. Some have lived their entire lives in refugee camps. Forty years later, Israel still refuses to recognize their right to exist as a nation.”

Now, the **first sentence**: “They have been fighting to regain a homeland since they were driven out in 1948.” Is Romy Ritter, the director of the Congress’s Pacific region saying that the Palestinians have not been fighting for the past sixty one years to regain their homeland or is she disputing the fact that “they were driven out in 1948”? If she is disputing that they were driven out, please consult with Israel historians like Benny Morris (“The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee problem, 1947-1949” & “Righteous Victims”), Simha Flapan (The Birth of Israel) and Ilan Pappé (The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1947-1951).

The facts speak for themselves. In 1948, Zionist forces wiped out over four hundred Palestinian towns and villages from the map of the world (see: “All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948” by Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi (<http://www.palestine-studies.org/books.aspx?id=591&href=details>)). And two-thirds of the Palestinian people were ethnically cleansed from their homeland and have never been allowed to return to their homes (see: The ethnic cleansing of Palestine By Ilan Pappé <http://www.amazon.com/Ethnic-Cleansing-Palestine-Ilan-Pappe/dp/1851684670>).

The **second sentence** states: “Some have lived their entire lives in refugee camps”. What is misleading and inaccurate about this sentence? If anything, it minimizes the numbers of refugees by saying “some”. There are around seven million Palestinian refugees world

wide and according to the UNRWA, there are 1,350,000 Palestinians still living in refugee camps throughout the Arab countries <http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/camp-profiles.html>. There are many Palestinian Canadians here in BC who have families living in refugee camps and you have traumatized the students of our community with your arbitrary action.

Let us look at the **third sentence**: “Forty years later, Israel still refuses to recognize their right to exist as a nation.” It seems this question was written 21 years ago because it is now 61 years and counting. The statement that Israel refuses to recognize the Palestinians as a nation is, to say the least, mildly put. Israel was built not only on the denial of Palestinian nationhood, but also on the denial of the very existence of the Palestinians as a people. Many early Zionists (Jewish and Christian) adopted the slogan "A land without a people for a people without a land". Also, the late Israeli Prime Minister, Golda Meir stated: "There is no such thing as a Palestinian people... It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn't exist." Golda Meir, statement to The Sunday Times, 15 June, 1969.

As you can see from the above details (and there are many more), the exam question does jive with historic facts. For you to interfere and remove it from the test is an outrageous act that amounts to censorship. It also shows that you are susceptible to bullying and dictates from the pro-Israel lobby. You don't want to be remembered as such and you do not want to be remembered as complicit in crimes against humanity, so please reinstate the question and apologize to the Palestinian people. You do not want to be known as the Minister who not only distressed and alienated students of Palestinian, Arab and Moslem descent in our province, but also rewrote history and undermined all those working so hard for genuine peace in the region.

And finally, if you believe you are the sole “decider” on what should appear on provincial and practice exams for BC students, we insist that you add the question below:

What do you call the acts of denial of all of the following: the Jewish Holocaust, the Ethnic Cleansing of Palestinians, the reparations for black slavery, the Aboriginal and the Armenian genocides?

- A. Acts of cowardice.
- B. Acts of distorting facts and history (Revisionism).
- C. Acts of complicity in crimes against humanity.
- D. All of the above

Should we dare request a meeting with you to clarify the facts or is that only reserved for the pro-Israel lobby? Or would you be interested to debate the issue publicly on Voice of Palestine, Vancouver?

Yours Truly,

Hanna Kawas

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Co-host, Voice of Palestine, Vancouver www.voiceofpalestine.ca

Cc: Canadian Arab Federation/Local and National; Independent Jewish Voices/Local and National; Jews for a Just Peace, Vancouver; Canada Palestine Support Network, Vancouver; Canadian Jewish Outlook Magazine; BCTF committees and organizations; Adala, Vancouver – Canadian Arab Justice Committee; Masjid Alsalaam, Burnaby Mosque and Education Centre; Social Justice Committee of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver; Solidarity with Palestinian Human Rights-UBC; Vancouver Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); B.C. Moslem Association; Arab Canadian Lawyers Association