

"I am proud to be a Palestinian" is an open letter sent by Hanna Kawas to Canada's Foreign Minister John Manley. It was sent on January 25, 2001.

I am proud to be a Palestinian

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Dear Mr. Manley,

On Jan. 18/ 2001, Agence France Presse(AFP) reported that Palestinian demonstrators in Balata refugee camp near Nablus denounced Canada and Australia for their offer to RESETTLE the Palestinian refugees, and that they burned an effigy of you during this protest. Perhaps this surprised you. Why is there such a strong feeling on the part of the Palestinian refugees, considering that they have lived in miserable conditions under the mercy of UNRWA handouts for the past 52 years, and under continuous Israeli bombing and siege for the past four months? Why would they reject the "good life" in Canada and Australia? As a Palestinian-Canadian, and a Palestinian refugee from the city of Bethlehem, allow me to offer an explanation.

Canada is directly and morally responsible for the dispossession of the Palestinian people

Briefly, here are a few examples of the historical complicity of the Canadian government in the continuing dispossession of the Palestinians.

1. The Canadian Balfour and the U.N. Partition Plan to create Israel: " Mr. Justice Ivan Rand... played a central role in formulating the recommendations of its majority report (for the U.N. Partition Plan) ... with Mr. (Lester) Pearson (then the under-secretary of state for External Affairs) playing an active role in securing its passage. ... Zionists were so grateful to Canada and to Mr. Pearson for the part he played in the whole process that they called him 'the Balfour of Canada'." (Report of the Canadian Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs published June 1985, page 49.)
2. Canadian volunteers and equipment to dispossess the Palestinian people: " The (Canadian) government was reluctant to draw attention to this matter (the Zionist volunteers) and refused to invoke the Foreign Enlistment Act (a law passed to discourage Canadians from fighting fascism during the Spanish Civil War) ... More than 300 Canadians eventually joined the Israeli forces while tons of military equipment, from Harvard training aircraft to radio sets, were smuggled out of Canadian ports. The recruiting of volunteers and the smuggling of arms were done with the active knowledge and assistance of leaders of the United Zionist Council..." (Canada and the birth of Israel, David J. Bercuson, page191.) Not one of the culprits who broke the Canadian law and the U.N. embargo were brought to justice, although they brag about it every year when they celebrate the founding of the Zionist State of Israel.
3. On May 11/1949, Canada co-sponsored the U.N. General Assembly resolution 273(111) to admit Israel as a state to the U.N. That resolution stated: " Recalling its resolution of 29 November 1947 (the Partition Plan) and 11 December 1948 (the Right of Return), and taking note of the declaration and explanation made by the representative of the government of Israel before the ad hoc Political committee in respect of the implementation of the said resolutions {my emphasis}, the General Assembly ... decides to admit Israel into the membership of the United Nations."

## Justice Delayed, Justice Denied

During the past 52 years, since the adoption of U.N. Resolution 194(111) of Dec. 11, 1948 recognizing the Palestinian right of return, the Western World - including Canada - has been encouraging, supporting and protecting Israel in its violations of international law and U.N. resolutions. Your latest statements to the "Toronto Star" on Jan. 10, 2001 (although not posted on your ministry's web site) are part of this longstanding biased position in favor of Israel and against the legitimate aspirations of the dispossessed Palestinian people. You are attempting with this 'trial balloon' on behalf of Israel and the U.S. to not only circumvent U.N. resolutions, but also to split the Palestinian people and their consensus on the right of return and on ending Israeli occupation. The U.N. resolutions Canada introduced and claimed to support during the process of creating Israel should be binding on all Canadian governments; without taking practical steps to implement them, sweet-talk alone does not absolve you from your direct and moral responsibility for the suffering of the Palestinian people.

In the "Toronto Star" article, you refer to our right of return as "that dream" and then state that you "are prepared to receive refugees" and "are prepared to contribute to an international fund to assist with resettlement..."

It seems very clear that you are offering your services not out of concern for the plight and suffering of the Palestinian refugees, but to save Israel from its obligations regarding U.N. resolutions. Was the purpose of these resolutions to create facts on the ground in Israel's favor and then to call the parts relating to the Palestinians a "dream"?

Almost every Palestinian in this country knows how you have treated us since the creation of the state of Israel. We have been and continue to be treated as "terrorists" and "criminals" by different Canadian departments including Immigration and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), and NOT as victims of the most atrocious crime committed against a whole nation. If you are indeed trying to introduce a new humane Canadian policy towards the Palestinian people, may we suggest that you treat us the same way you treat Israeli citizens and allow us to enter Canada as visitors without a visa. Or may be you should offer the Israelis what you are offering us: resettlement in Canada if they renounce their "Law of Return".

## End Israeli Occupation

I read your letter of January 12, 2001, to Mr. Nabil Ayyad, the president of the "Canadian Palestinian Centre". It is also not posted on your ministry's web site. If the letter is authentic, I think that CIDA's donations of \$330,000 for Palestinian humanitarian institutions are commendable. Any donation is appreciated, but I am sure you realize that this meager amount will not change the total picture of suffering. One victim of a car accident here in Canada could get more compensation than what you sent. Recent estimates put the injured by Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) at 16,000 since the start of the Al Aqsa intifada on September 28, 2000, in addition to the estimated 350 Palestinians murdered by the IOF. The only way to stop this carnage is to force Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands, dare we suggest the same way you and your western allies forced Iraq out of Kuwait, without waiting for 52 years of U.N. resolutions and "peace talks".

In your letter to Mr. Ayyad, you affirmed Canada's support for Resolution 194. If that is truly so, why are you calling the right of return a "dream"? Why are you offering to "resettle" the Palestinian refugees? Why are you still protecting Israel by extending diplomatic, economic and political support, while leaving the Palestinians under the mercy of a brutal military machine? By abstaining on the

recent U.N. Security Draft Resolution (Dec.18/2000) to send International Forces to protect the Palestinian people, you carry a direct responsibility for the failure of that resolution and accordingly for the current bloodbath the Palestinian people are enduring.

### Birthright Denied

In my own personal experience, Canada has denied me my birthright. As if it was not enough that Israel dispossessed me, my family and my people, Canada has to take the side of my oppressor and deny even the existence of my country, Palestine. When I applied for my 3rd Canadian passport on June 9/ 1997, the Passport Office in Surrey, the CEO of the Passport office in Ottawa, Mr. M.J. Hutton, and your predecessor Mr. Axworthy all refused to acknowledge the fact that I was born in Palestine, and that Palestine is my country of birth. They refused to put this on my latest Canadian passport, even though the other two Canadian passports I was previously issued showed PALESTINE as my birthplace. (For more detail on the subject, see 'Birthright Denied' published by the Canada Palestine Association, June 1999.) The above incident is not an isolated one. It is a part of pro-Israel policies adopted by successive Canadian governments that aim at liquidating the national character of the Palestinian people.

### Hypocrisy and Double Standards

As a proud Palestinian, I don't appreciate you calling my people's struggle against the Israeli Occupation Forces "acts of terror". I do not appreciate you equating the legitimate resistance of my dispossessed people with the violence of a brutal occupier and oppressor.

Why this hypocrisy and the double standards? You never referred to the French resistance against Nazi occupation as "acts of terror", and more recently, you did not label the Kuwaiti, East European, Afghani, Bosnian or Kosovar resistance as "terrorist". Are we Palestinians less human, to the point that international law and human rights standards do not apply to us?

Finally, when you accepted the Kosovars, the Indochinese and other refugees you did not put a condition on them to renounce their right of return to their respective homelands. Why demand that only from the Palestinian people, or else their chance to come to Canada is in jeopardy? In your interview with the "Toronto Star", you said, "Palestinians are not going to cease to exist either. They are going to need a place to live." While it is true that we refuse to disappear, the only place we need and want to live in is Palestine, no matter what the western powers' schemes might be for the Middle East and its peoples.

Thank you for your attention

Yours truly  
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