

Canadian Christian, Jewish, Muslim Faith and Cultural Groups Denounce Harper Government's Dismal Record on Human Rights for Palestinians,

Call for Boycott of Illegally-produced Israeli Goods

On February 3, 2010, a number of Canadian faith and ethno-cultural organizations denounced the Harper government's record regarding human rights for the Palestinian people, calling it an affront to democracy, Canadian values and international law. In addition the groups called upon the Canadian government and the Canadian people to respond to the united cry of the Palestinian community for the application of international means of pressure on Israel, particularly through boycott, divestment and/or sanctions, to live up to its obligations as defined by the United Nations. Speakers represented the Holy Land Awareness and Action Task Group of South West Presbytery in The United Church of Canada, Independent Jewish Voices, the Canadian Arab Federation, the Canadian Islamic Congress, and the Peace and Social Action Committee of the Toronto Friends Meeting (Quakers).

Brian McIntosh, representing the Holy Land group within the United Church, whose national body has been severely criticized by the Canadian Jewish Congress in recent weeks, said that the regional group has sought to be in solidarity with Independent Jewish Voices and others who share the view that the Harper government has become ideologically biased with regard to policies of the Israeli government and human rights for Palestinians. "We are ... alarmed by a series of decisions made and events perpetrated by the Stephen Harper government in recent months which betray a clear if unspoken agenda to refrain from any criticism of Israel's violation of international law regarding human rights for Palestinians, and a politicizing of the Canadian cultural landscape away from the upholding of those rights and toward the vilification of any who advocate for those rights."

McIntosh, whose Holy Land group called those present at the news conference together, said that they did so to make public the growing unity across Christian and interfaith groups regarding the pursuit of a just peace in the holy land through the upholding of Palestinian human rights. He also said that the groups were united in their denunciation of any "ideological intention to criminalize criticism of Israel as anti-semitic."

McIntosh and other presenters made reference to the unquestioned right of Israel to exist, to the necessity to "root out all real and dangerous forms of anti-semitism," and criticized suicide bombings as an illegitimate form of political dissent. But McIntosh also asserted that historic Christian guilt about the Holocaust has created a code of silence regarding Israel. "Our historic shame regarding the Holocaust has left us unable, in many cases, to actually speak the truth as we see it regarding Palestinian human rights, an inability that, in our opinion, creates a new collective shame," said McIntosh.

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