

Here's What Amnesty International's Report Calling Out Israeli Apartheid Means for Canada

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“Amnesty is sending a message to governments like Canada that we have to do everything we can to distance ourselves from that regime.”

Amnesty International.

A damning [report](#) by human rights group Amnesty International finding that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid against Palestinians should be a wake up call for Canada to reevaluate its relationship with that country, according to advocates.

Aaron Lakoff, a spokesperson for Independent Jewish Voices Canada, told *The Maple* his organization welcomed the report.

“I think it represents a real tide changer,” said Lakoff. “The only thing that’s surprising about it is that it’s taken this long for organizations like Amnesty to come out with those kinds of conclusions, when Palestinians have been saying it for decades.”

Lakoff added that he hopes Canadian members of Parliament and cabinet ministers will take the report’s findings seriously, and take meaningful action to help end Israel’s apartheid system.

“I think the ball is in their court in terms of, are they going to just simply ignore this thing that millions of people around the world and more and more Canadians are talking about, or are they going to take some sort of concrete action to make sure that Canada isn’t complicit in Israeli apartheid?,” said Lakoff.

In a [news release](#), Amnesty said the report “sets out how massive seizures of Palestinian land and property, unlawful killings, forcible transfer, drastic movement restrictions, and the denial of nationality and citizenship to Palestinians are all components of a system which amounts to apartheid under international law.”

The group added: “This system is maintained by violations which Amnesty International found to constitute apartheid as a crime against humanity, as defined in the Rome Statute and Apartheid Convention.”

The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid defines apartheid as a system designed to maintain one racial group's domination over another through policies or practices that include murder, bodily or mental harm, arbitrary arrest and illegal imprisonment, poor living conditions, denial of basic rights, racial segregation, exploitative labour practices, and persecution of opponents.

According to Amnesty's report, examples of Israel committing apartheid against Palestinians include treating them “as an inferior racial group”; unlawful killings and acts of violence; enforcing massive land seizures and home demolitions; passing discriminatory zoning and planning policies; blocking Palestinians from leasing 80 per cent of Israel’s state lands and forcing them to live in small enclaves; legal regimes that ensure the denial of nationality and status; constructing illegal settlements; targeting Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem; implementing draconian restrictions of movement through military checkpoints and roadblocks; enforcing socio-economic marginalization; and instituting a discriminatory permit system.

Israel has pursued deliberately discriminatory policies, Amnesty found, in ways that have “no reasonable basis in security or “defence.””

Amnesty stated: “Israel’s treatment of Palestinians across all areas is pursuant to the same objective: to privilege Jewish Israelis in distribution of land and resources, and to minimize the Palestinian presence and access to land.”

The report found that while Israel’s discriminatory system is not applied uniformly across all areas under its control, even Palestinians with Israeli citizenship or permanent residency, who comprise more than one-fifth of the population, face institutionalized discrimination.

Michael Bueckert, vice-president of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, told *The Maple* he was impressed by the scope of the report, noting it examined the conditions of all Palestinians, not just those living in the occupied territories.

“They’re all victims of a single apartheid regime, which has the intention of privileging Jewish Israelis and dominating Palestinians,” said Bueckert.

As well, Bueckert noted, the report examined how 1948, the year when Israel was founded, was a “pivotal moment” when many of the discriminatory policies amounting to apartheid were first implemented.

“Amnesty is sending a message to governments like Canada that we have to do everything we can to distance ourselves from that regime and make sure that not we’re not complicit in that domination,” he added.

In addition to calling on Israel to dismantle its system of apartheid, Amnesty recommends that the International Criminal Court consider the crime of apartheid in its current investigation into alleged war crimes committed by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Bueckert noted that in 2020, Canada opposed that investigation being launched.

Amnesty also calls on the UN Security Council to impose a comprehensive arms embargo on Israel, in addition to targeted sanctions, including asset freezes against officials who are most complicit in committing apartheid.

As well, the report calls on all governments, particularly those that enjoy “close diplomatic relations with Israel,” to stop providing aid and assistance to the apartheid system, and calls on all states to impose a ban on products from Israeli settlements.

Lakoff said he hopes the report’s section concerning Israel’s allies serves as a wake-up call for politicians in Canada, noting that this country sells weapons to Israel. In 2020, Canada’s Transport Ministry awarded a \$36.16-million drone contract to Elbit Systems Ltd., an Israeli military technology company.

“That’s the kind of thing that should be immediately cancelled,” said Lakoff, who added that he hopes there will also be a push to ban the sale in Canada of products from illegal Israeli settlements.

Bueckert said expansions to the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA) over the past few years have effectively provided subsidies to Israeli producers based in illegal settlements.

“Canada is going exactly in the wrong direction, and so this should pose a fundamental challenge to members of Parliament,” said Bueckert.

“I think the principles of grassroots pressure, building relationships with movements on the ground, and putting pressure on our local institutions like boycotting products, getting our unions or universities to divest ... are the way forward when we have an intransigent political class,” he added.

Omar Youssef/Unsplash.

Lakoff said he thinks the media’s reception of the Amnesty report has been “very telling,” noting that CBC News ran a two-minute segment on the report this week even though the public broadcaster did not cover a Human Rights Watch report published last April that drew similar conclusions.

However, Lakoff noted, CBC’s online print article covering the report omitted the word “apartheid” from its headline. Still, he added, “I think what we’re seeing is that Israeli apartheid has gotten to the state where it’s impossible to ignore.”

Responding to the report, Israel's foreign ministry and pro-Israel lobby groups in Canada accused Amnesty of fuelling “anti-semitism” and of attempting to “delegitimize” Israel, claims rebuffed by the human rights organization this week. Lakoff characterized the charges against Amnesty as “cynical.”

“I think that argument just no longer holds any ground anymore,” said Lakoff. “To call a spade a spade is not anti-semitic.” He noted that a poll released last summer found that one-quarter of American Jewish people regard Israel as an apartheid state.

“Part of being Jewish compels us to repair the world, to fight for a better world, and we can do that by supporting Palestinian rights,” Lakoff added.

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