Hon. Mélanie Joly  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Ms. Joly,

I am writing to you as President of the Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME, www.cjpme.org). CJPME’s mission is to enable Canadians of all backgrounds to promote justice, development, and peace in the Middle East, and here at home in Canada. CJPME works to inform Canadian politicians, policymakers, and the media on issues of human rights in the Middle East. We have over 200,000 adherents, and local groups and volunteers in all of Canada's Major cities.

I am writing this letter to follow up on Canada's upsetting response to the recent United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry report that came out early last week. This report was submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution S-30/1, which was adopted on May 27, 2021. The Commission was given a mandate to investigate violations of international humanitarian law that occurred within the Occupied Palestinian Territories, East Jerusalem, and Israel related to the events of the spring of 2021 (e.g. skirmishes at the Al Aqsa Mosque, "evictions" in Sheik Jarrah, and bombing/rockets in Gaza, etc). The Commission was also asked to investigate the underlying root causes of recurring tensions, instability and the protracted nature of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The COI published its report last week, and highlighted the following points in its summary assessment:

- That ending Israel's military occupation of Palestinian lands, in full conformity with Security Council resolutions, remains an essential starting point for the ending the persistent cycle of violence;
- That, in contrast, there is every indication that Israel plans to maintain and deepen its military occupation, as evidenced by its actions to alter the territories' demography through repression of Palestinians and favouritism toward Israeli settlers;
- That the persistent discrimination against Palestinians by Israel, whether through threats of forced displacement, forced displacement, demolitions, settlement expansion and settler violence and the blockade of Gaza contribute massively to cycles of violence;
- That the failure to hold Israel accountable for its ongoing military occupation of Palestinian lands and associated human rights abuses deepens the frustration and resentment felt by Palestinians;
• That the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and Gaza, must do more to provide truly representative governance;
• That Palestinian women's empowerment depends on an end to Israel's military occupation of Palestinian land, and respect for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the Israeli and Palestinian leadership;
• That third States and private actors also have a role to play in ending the root causes of the cycles of violence by ensuring respect for and full compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law.

The COI report also included compelling arguments that suggest how Israel functions as a settler-colonial state. The COI pointed out how Israel has implemented extensive infrastructure projects to facilitate the mobility of illegal Israeli settlers and enable illegal settlements to expand rapidly. Conversely, the COI report pointed out that it is almost impossible for Palestinians to get building permits in much of their territory due to discriminatory Israeli zoning and planning regimes. The COI reported that at the end of 2019, there were 441,600 settlers living illegally in the West Bank and 228,437 living illegally in East Jerusalem. These Jewish-only Israeli settlements violate Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which strictly prohibits the occupying power from transferring parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.

To our extreme disappointment, Canada signed a letter submitted to the UN by the US on June 13, 2022, which sought to dismiss and discredit the COI's report. The letter ignored the very alarming findings of the COI, preferring instead to accuse the UNHRC of bias against Israel, and the COI of having an unrestricted mandate. This continues a longstanding pattern by Canada's Liberal government of dismissing important independent analyses of the Israel-Palestine conflict without addressing the substance of such reports. The day-to-day rights abuses and indignities faced by the Palestinian people at the hands of the state of Israel are real and devastating. Your participation and leadership in this dismissive approach is reprehensible.

Instead of acquiescing to the US' disgraceful dismissal of the report, Canada should take the COI's findings seriously. As a third party, Canada should support of the investigation of violations of international law in Palestine-Israel, and play a leading role in defending human rights diplomatically and practically. As such, Canada should:

• Condemn Israel's ongoing human rights violations whenever appropriate, just as it condemns Russia's human rights violations against the Ukrainians;
• End its practice of providing diplomatic cover for Israel's inexcusable human rights violations;
• Reconsider all existing bilateral agreements and activities with Israel to ensure that these are not contributing to human rights abuses, including, but not limited to:
  o The Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA);
  o The Canada-Israel Agreement on Bilateral Cooperation in Industrial Research and Development (CIIRDF);
  o The Canada-Israel Strategic Partnership MOU;
  o Canada's arms sales to Israel;
• End its "security aid" for the Palestinian Authority, and re-assign such funds to programs in good governance and judicial independence; and
• Pressure the leadership of the Palestinian Authority to provide truly representative governance for the Palestinian people.

For the fifth time this year, I again reiterate the request of my organization to meet with you face-to-face to discuss our very serious concerns. I can be reached at 438-380-5410.

Sincerely,

Thomas E. Woodley
President, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East

cc: Canada-Palestine Parliamentary Friendship Association