



CJPME | CANADIANS FOR JUSTICE AND
PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the
Middle East
580 Sainte-Croix, Suite 050
Saint-Laurent, QC H4L 3X5
June 21st, 2022

Bob Rae
Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations
466 Lexington Avenue, 20th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA

Dear Mr. Rae,

I am writing this letter in response to your article published in the Globe and Mail, “Canada has a choice to make in how it responds to a global refugee crisis.” I am Director, Policy and Media Engagement at Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME, www.cjpme.org), an organization which works for justice, development, and peace in the Middle East. My organization has long advocated for refugees in the Middle East, especially Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

While your article brought up a number of good points regarding Canada’s responsibilities with the global refugee crisis, I felt that your article nevertheless reflected serious biases on the part of you and your government.

I appreciate how you highlighted the terrible persecution of the Rohingya, and how their mere “right to exist” is threatened by an angry and misinformed majority. The Ukrainians are also another ballooning refugee population that deserves our sympathy and attention because, as you say, Russia literally rejects Ukrainian “nationhood.”

While I and my organization certainly have great sympathy for the Rohingya, I wonder why your article failed to mention the plight of the far more numerous Palestinian refugees.

WorldPopulationReview.com says there are 1.2 million Rohingya refugees, more recently they have grown to almost 6 million Palestinian refugees. While Rohingya refugees have languished in refugee camps since 2015, the Palestinian refugees – and their descendants – have been stuck in refugee camps since 1948. Your failure to mention the Palestinian refugees in your article is quite striking, especially given that Canada is the gavel holder for the Refugee Working Group from the Oslo peace process and has a potentially unique role to play in solving that crisis.

You laud the world’s rapid response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, and it is indeed admirable. You are right to point out that other refugee populations are right to be resentful of this partiality for the Ukrainian refugees. Yet again, in listing important refugee populations, you fail to mention the Palestinian refugees. It’s hard to believe that this is yet another simple oversight, especially given that Canada supports Palestinian refugees to the tune of \$25 million annually. While this aid for Palestinian refugees is sorely needed and appreciated, the fact that this aid has not increased since the early 2000s does not go unnoticed.



For some reason, your article assumes the posture of a citizen advocate, rather than a person who's in a position of authority and decision-making. If Canada's ambassador to the UN is limited to opinion pieces in the Globe and Mail to effect change, we are truly adrift as a country. Rather than talking vaguely about imagination, compassion and execution, you should be explaining the Liberal government's vision for effective leadership to address the global migration crises ahead.

On the whole, it's hard to take your core argument – that Canada is a leader “in the field of refugee acceptance and immigrant integration” seriously. It's hard to think of a conflict-torn place in the world that doesn't have Canada's fingerprints all over it. From Afghanistan, to Iraq, to Syria, to Libya, to Yemen, Canada has variously sent soldiers, arms, training, equipment, and tacit support for the violence. And again, let's not forget the six million Palestinians who can trace their refugee status to the Canada-sanctioned partition of Palestine in 1947.

If Canada is going to take a position of leadership vis-à-vis the world's refugees, it's going to have to drop the biases implicit in your opinion piece. Canada needs to stop cherry-picking the refugee crises it will address, condemning those caused by its “enemies” and ignoring those precipitated by its “allies.” As your column states, a “global crisis of displacement,” is coming, yet rather than applying imagination and compassion as you suggest, the current government seems intent on entrenching patterns of Cold War hegemony.

I and my organization are keen to discuss these and other refugee and foreign policy issues with you. Please contact me at 438-380-5410 to begin a conversation about what a truly creative and compassionate Canadian refugee response would look like.

Sincerely,

Malak Sameh, Director, Policy and Media Engagement
Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East