



CJPME

CANADIANS FOR JUSTICE AND
PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Canadians for Justice and Peace
in the Middle East
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February 8, 2023
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Hon. Mary Ng
Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion,
Small Business and Economic Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Ng,

I'm writing to you on behalf of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME, <https://www.cjpme.org>) to request an explanation for your recent meeting with Ofir Akunis, Minister of Innovation, Science and Technology in Israel's far-right government. This meeting raises troubling human rights concerns given the Israeli government's espousal of supremacist views, its intentions to illegally annex the occupied West Bank, and the growing recognition that Israel's practices amount to the crime of apartheid under international law.

On February 2, 2023, the Twitter account @CanadaTrade [tweeted](#):

"Today, Minister Ng and Ofir Akunis, Israel's Minister of Innovation, Science and Technology, discussed how the 2 countries are working together to strengthen their vibrant research and innovation partnerships to build the knowledge economy of the #future. 🇨🇦🇮🇱"

I'm sure you are aware that Minister Akunis represents a government led by Benjamin Netanyahu, which is the [most far-right in Israel's history](#).¹ At the end of last year, the governing coalition published a statement of principles which [expressed](#) blatantly supremacist views, claiming that "the Jewish people have an *exclusive* and inalienable right to *all parts of the Land of Israel*," including the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT).² This is an explicit denial of the rights of Palestinians in any portion of the territory under Israeli control. Key Israeli Ministers such as [Itamar Ben-Gvir](#)³ and [Bezalel Smotrich](#),⁴ who have been given significant control over the lives of Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line, hold extremist and racist views and may be appropriately [described](#) as fascists.⁵ It cannot be stressed enough that this ideologically racist government poses a severe threat to the rights and safety of all Palestinians.

Further, the Israeli government has openly announced its intentions to commit grave breaches of international law. The coalition has promised to expand Jewish settlements in all areas under its control and is committed to advancing the "application of sovereignty" – a euphemism for [annexation](#) – over the occupied West Bank.⁶ Such activities are strictly prohibited under the Fourth Geneva Convention, amounting to war crimes, and would significantly infringe upon the individual and collective rights of Palestinians.

Minister Akunis is himself an anti-Palestinian extremist and a supremacist. He is a long-time proponent of illegally annexing the West Bank, [promising](#) in 2020 that "I will never

agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria [the occupied West Bank] and I will continue to promote, with all my might, the application of sovereignty [annexation], which is an historical process that cannot be prevented.”⁷ In 2017, he [claimed](#) that “Israel *in its entirety* is the country of the Jewish People, and *the right to it belongs only to the Jewish People*” (emphasis added).⁸ These extremist and dehumanizing statements should disqualify him from working with the Canadian government.

Finally, you may be aware that there is an emerging consensus within the human rights sector that Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians amounts to the crime against humanity of apartheid. This legal perspective is held by [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [UN experts](#), and both [Israeli](#) and [Palestinian](#) human rights organizations working on the ground.⁹ Amnesty Canada has specifically [urged](#) Prime Minister Trudeau to “ensure that human rights are central to your government’s engagements with Israeli authorities, and that Canada’s businesses do not contribute to maintaining apartheid.”¹⁰

In this context, your meeting with Israeli Minister Akunis is completely unacceptable. We demand clarification about this meeting, and insist upon a prompt response to the following questions:

1. Have you assessed the human rights implications of undertaking any partnership(s) with Israel’s far-right government?
2. Have you assessed the possibility that any partnership(s) may enable or contribute to violations of international law, including planned annexation and the crime of apartheid?
3. Were any issues of human rights or international law raised with Minister Akunis?
4. What is the nature of the partnership(s) discussed with Minister Akunis, including activities and goals?

We look forward to receiving your response to these important questions. Going forward we insist that you suspend all partnerships with Israel’s government until it fully respects international law and is no longer violating the human and political rights of the Palestinian people.

Sincerely,



Michael Bueckert, PhD
Vice President
Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East

CC:

Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Arif Virani, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Export
Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development
Canada-Palestine Parliamentary Friendship Group
Michael Chong, Conservative Foreign Affairs critic
Heather McPherson, NDP Foreign Affairs Critic

Stéphane Bergeron, Bloc Québécois Foreign Affairs critic
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party
Lisa Stadelbauer, Canada's Ambassador to Israel
David Da Silva, Canada's Representative to the Palestinian Authority

¹ Natasha Roth-Rowland, "Land grabs. Homophobia. Radicalized police: What to expect from Israel's far-right government," *+972 Magazine*, December 29, 2022, <https://www.972mag.com/israel-far-right-government-plans/>

² Carrie Keller-Lynn and Michael Bachner, "Judicial reform, boosting Jewish identity: The new coalition's policy guidelines," *Times of Israel*, December 28, 2022, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/judicial-reform-boosting-jewish-identity-the-new-coalitions-policy-guidelines/>

³ Jewish Power's Itamar Ben Gvir is a supporter of the fascist Kahanist movement. Until recently, he had a picture of Jewish terrorist Baruch Goldstein – who murdered 29 Palestinians in the Hebron Ibrahimi Mosque in 1994 – displayed in his home. He has pulled a gun on Palestinian protestors in Sheikh Jarrah, telling police "If they throw stones, shoot them." As Israel's new National Security Minister, Ben Gvir now has control over policing agencies which operate in both Israel and the OPT.

⁴ Religious Zionism's Bezalel Smotrich is an extremist settler. He has promoted the total annexation of the West Bank, defended the racial segregation of maternal wards, and called himself a "proud homophobe." In the new government, Smotrich has been given unprecedented control over the infrastructure of occupation, putting him in control of policy regarding both Israeli settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank.

⁵ Ben Reiff, "Israelis are calling their leaders fascists. Why can't British politicians?" *+972 Magazine*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.972mag.com/fascists-britain-israel/>

⁶ Lily Galili, "Israel's West Bank annexation is coming, just not in the way you expected," *Middle East Eye*, December 17, 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-west-bank-annexation-coming-not-way-expected>

⁷ Tovah Lazaroff, "Minister Akunis: I'll promote annexation and oppose a Palestinian state," *Jerusalem Post*, September 1, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/minister-akunis-ill-promote-annexation-and-oppose-a-palestinian-state-640736>

⁸ Yoni Kempinski, "There is only one settlement bloc: The entire Land of Israel," *Arutz Sheva*, February 14, 2017, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/224991>

⁹ Amnesty International, "Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity," February 1, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/>; Human Rights Watch, "A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and persecution," April 27, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>; B'Tselem, "A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid," January 12, 2021, https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid. For a list of UN bodies, Israeli and Palestinian NGOs, and other prominent figures to use the framework of apartheid, see CJPME's resource, "Who is talking about Israeli apartheid?" https://www.cjpme.org/apartheid_list

¹⁰ Letter from Amnesty Canada to Prime Minister Trudeau, February 1, 2022, https://amnesty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/AICES_IOPT_PMO_MOFA.01.02.2022.pdf