

Canadians for Justice and Peace  
in the Middle East  
580 Sainte-Croix, Suite 060  
Saint-Laurent, QC H4L 3X5  
March 1, 2023  
438-380-5410

The Honorable George J. Furey, Q.C.  
Speaker of the Senate of Canada  
2 Rideau Street (Senate of Canada Building)  
Ottawa Ontario, K1A 0A4

The Honourable Donald Neil Plett  
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate  
2 Rideau Street (Senate of Canada Building)  
Ottawa Ontario, K1A 0A4

The Honorable Patti Laboucane-Benson  
Senator  
2 Rideau Street (Senate of Canada Building)  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A4

Dear Honorable Senators Furey, Plett, and Laboucane-Benson,

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 visit to the Israeli Knesset and other Israeli institutions, including a meeting with Knesset Speaker MK Amir Ohana (Likud). This visit raises troubling human rights concerns given recent incidents of extreme violence against Palestinians, the Israeli government's espousal of supremacist views, its actions to illegally annex the occupied West Bank, and the growing recognition that Israel's practices amount to the crime of apartheid under international law.

A press release [issued](#) by the Israeli Knesset on February 27, 2023 noted the visit between Senator Furey and MK Ohana, describing a "warm welcome" and "successful and fruitful meetings," and said that MK Ohana was invited for "an official visit to Canada."<sup>1</sup> Further [tweets](#) from the Embassy of Canada to Israel described the conversations of various meetings as being about increasing Canada-Israel "cooperation" [and](#) supporting a "strong bilateral relationship.

I'm sure you are aware that MK Amir Ohana was elected to the coalition government led by Benjamin Netanyahu, which is the [most far-right in Israel's history](#).<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup> 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](#)<sup>4</sup> and [Bezalel Smotrich](#),<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

It cannot be stressed enough that this ideologically racist government poses a severe threat to the rights and safety of all Palestinians. This is not a hypothetical concern. In the days leading up to your visit, Israel launched a [deadly raid](#) in the middle of the city of Nablus, in the occupied West Bank, killing at least 10 Palestinians including three elderly people and a child.<sup>7</sup> On Sunday evening, hundreds of Israeli settlers committed a [pogrom](#) on the Palestinian towns of Huwara, Zaatara, Burin, and Asira al-Qibliya, killing at least 1 Palestinian and wounding at least 390. Multiple far-right coalition lawmakers including Minister Smotrich have [incited](#) terrorism and genocide, calling for “burning villages” and for Huwara to be “wiped out.”<sup>8</sup>

Already within the last two weeks, the coalition has [advanced](#) more than 15 new illegal settlements<sup>9</sup> and more than 7,000 illegal settlement units<sup>10</sup> in occupied territory. Just days ago, Israel transferred sweeping powers over civilian matters in the West Bank to Minister Smotrich, transferring authority outside of the purview of the military, in a move which is widely understood to amount to the *de jure* annexation of the territory.<sup>11</sup> Such activities are strictly prohibited under the Fourth Geneva Convention, amounting to war crimes, and significantly infringe upon the individual and collective rights of Palestinians.

Israel’s Knesset Speaker, MK Amir Ohana, is himself an anti-Palestinian extremist and a supremacists, whose dehumanizing statements and actions should disqualify him from working with Canadian officials:

- In a 2017 [interview](#), he said that Palestinians are only “guests” in Palestine and that it is not their country; he also said that Muslims possess a “cultural murderousness.”<sup>12</sup>
- In 2018, he played an instrumental role in the drafting and passage of Israel’s racist “Nation State Law.” Ohana himself [described](#) the discriminatory intent of the law, boasting that it states “clearly that the State of Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, *and theirs only*.”<sup>13</sup> According to [analysis](#) by Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, the law “has distinct apartheid characteristics” and “denies the collective rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel.”<sup>14</sup>
- In 2020, as Public Security minister, he [ordered](#) the Israel prison service *not* to vaccinate Palestinian prisoners for the coronavirus.<sup>15</sup>
- In 2021, as Public Security minister, he [defended](#) as “law-abiding citizens” a group of Jewish Israelis who murdered a Palestinian citizen of Israel and allegedly pressured police to close the investigation.<sup>16</sup>

However, these issues are much deeper than the current far-right government in power. 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.<sup>17</sup> Amnesty Canada has specifically [urged](#) Prime Minister Trudeau to “ensure that human rights are central to your government’s engagements with Israeli authorities.”<sup>18</sup>

In this context, your visit to the Israeli Knesset and your meeting with MK Ohana are completely unacceptable. We demand clarification about this meeting, and insist upon a prompt response to the following questions:

1. Did you raise issues of human rights or international law with MK Ohana or other Israeli officials?

2. What precautions have you taken to ensure that any partnership(s) with Israel's far-right government will not enable or contribute to violations of international law, including settlement expansion, annexation, and the crime of apartheid?
3. Given the Israeli government's actions to date, what are the 'red lines' that Israel could cross which would force you to reconsider your approach?

We look forward to receiving your response to these important questions. Going forward we insist that you **retract your invitation to MK Ohana and 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  
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, Co-Leader of the Green Party  
Lisa Stadelbauer, Canada's Ambassador to Israel  
David Da Silva, Canada's Representative to the Palestinian Authority

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<sup>1</sup> The Knesset, "Knesset Speaker MK Ohana to Speaker of the Canadian Senate: Canada is one of Israel's closest friends, the two countries are committed to shared values and have many common interests," February 27, 2023, <https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/Pages/press27223t.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> 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/>

<sup>3</sup> 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/>

<sup>4</sup> 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 Ibrahim 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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/>

<sup>7</sup> CJPME, “Canada Must Condemn Israeli Massacre in Nablus,” February 22, 2023, [https://www.cjpme.org/pr\\_2023\\_02\\_22](https://www.cjpme.org/pr_2023_02_22)

<sup>8</sup> CJPME: “Canada Must Hold Israel Responsible for Settler Terror,” February 27, 2023, [https://www.cjpme.org/pr\\_2023\\_02\\_27](https://www.cjpme.org/pr_2023_02_27); Chen Maanit and Haaretz, “Palestinian ‘Village of Hawara Needs to Be Wiped Out’: Israel’s Far-right Finance Minister Justifies ‘Disproportionate’ Response to Terrorism,” *Haaretz*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-03-01/ty-article/.premium/palestinian-village-of-hawara-needs-to-be-wiped-out-israels-finance-minister/00000186-9d56-df48-ab96-bd576aac0000>

<sup>9</sup> Peace Now Israel, “The government will advance over 6,000 housing units in settlements, including the authorization of five additional outposts,” February 19, 2023, <https://peacenow.org.il/en/the-government-will-advance-over-6000-housing-units-in-settlements-including-the-authorization-of-five-additional-outposts>

<sup>10</sup> Yaniv Kobovich, “Israel Approves Plans for Over 7,000 Housing Units in West Bank Settlements,” February 23, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-02-23/ty-article/.premium/israel-advancing-plans-for-housing-units-in-west-bank-settlements-legalizing-outposts/00000186-800f-d525-a9ef-96bf4ee00000>

<sup>11</sup> Haaretz Editorial, “Israel’s Cabinet Just Advanced Full-fledged Apartheid in the West Bank,” February 26, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/2023-02-26/ty-article/.premium/israels-cabinet-just-advanced-full-fledged-apartheid-in-the-west-bank/00000186-8a7e-d525-a9ef-9ef63060000>; Oscar Rickett, “Israel: Pro-settler minister handed West Bank powers in ‘de jure annexation,’” *Middle East Eye*, February 24, 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-settler-minister-west-bank-powers-annexation>

<sup>12</sup> Ravit Hecht, “Muslims Are Prone to ‘Cultural Murderousness’ and Israel Belongs to the Jews, Says Lawmaker Amir Ohana,” *Haaretz*, October 11, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2017-10-11/ty-article-magazine/.premium/israeli-lawmaker-muslims-are-prone-to-cultural-murderousness/0000017f-e5b7-da9b-a1ff-edff0c110000>

<sup>13</sup> Lahav Harkov, “Revised nation-state bill deals with Jewish-democratic imbalance concerns,” *Jerusalem Post*, November 10, 2017, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/revised-nation-state-bill-deals-with-jewish-democratic-imbalance-concerns-513810>

<sup>14</sup> Adalah, Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, “Israel’s Jewish Nation-State Law,” February 20, 2020, <https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/9569>

<sup>15</sup> Josh Breiner, Israeli Minister Orders Not to Vaccinate Palestinian Security Prisoners, Despite COVID Directives, *Haaretz*, December 27, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2020-12-27/ty-article/.highlight/against-covid-directives-israeli-minister-orders-not-to-vaccinate-prisoners/0000017f-e2e8-d75c-a7ff-feed244d0000>

<sup>16</sup> Tamara Nassar, “Video may reveal Israeli cover-up in killing of Palestinian citizen,” *Electronic Intifada*, May 5, 2022, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/tamara-nassar/video-may-reveal-israeli-cover-killing-palestinian-citizen>

<sup>17</sup> 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](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](https://www.cjpme.org/apartheid_list)

<sup>18</sup> 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](https://amnesty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/AICES_IOPT_PMO_MOFA.01.02.2022.pdf)