

## Letter to PM Trudeau and Party Leaders re Nakba Day Commemoration

May 12, 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

We write to you on behalf of United Network for a Just Peace for Palestine and Israel. We are a national network of United Church of Canada members and friends dedicated to a just and lasting peace for the people of Palestine and Israel in the Holy Land.

The Liberal Party and the Canadian government have issued public statements celebrating Israel's independence day, Yom Ha'Atzmaut. We wonder why there is no recognition of Nakba Day for Palestinians?

Israel declared statehood on May 15, 1948 based on United Nations Resolution 181, which proposed that British Mandatory Palestine be partitioned into a Jewish and an Arab state, with Jerusalem under international jurisdiction. The proposed Jewish state represented 56% of British Mandatory Palestine, despite the fact that Jews constituted one third of the population, and owned only 6% of the land.

The indigenous Arab population, which was never consulted, found this proposal unjust. Prior to Israel's declaration of statehood, more than 300,000 native Palestinians were forcibly displaced by Zionist military forces. In the war that followed Israel's declaration of statehood an additional 450,000 other Palestinians were forcibly displaced. By the end of the hostilities, more than 750,000 indigenous Palestinians had become refugees. Also, during this conflict, Zionist forces eradicated over 500 Palestinian communities and engaged in more than 33 massacres.

As you are aware the right of return of refugees is clearly protected under the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention. Also, the right of return for native Palestinians was a precondition for Israel's admittance into the United Nations. Yet, even today, Israel denies responsibility for this refugee crisis and still refuses to allow indigenous Palestinians to return to their homes.

Zionists—both Jewish and Christian—celebrate Israel's statehood each year. Meanwhile, Palestinians regard May 15, 1948 as a catastrophe (nakba in Arabic), and annually commemorate this episode in their nation's history as Nakba Day.

You have stated you want Canada to play the role of "honest broker" in the Middle East. Therefore, it seems just and fair that our government acknowledge Nakba Day as well as Yom Ha'Atzmaut, thus sending a balanced and principled message to Canadians and the international community regarding Palestine and Israel.

We respectfully request your government treat Palestinians with the same dignity and respect which you provide for Israel by acknowledging the historic reality. In so doing, the Government will clearly indicate that it will play the role of "honest broker" in the Middle East through a balanced treatment of Palestinians and Israelis alike. We look forward to our government's statements action in recognition of both Yom Ha'Atzmaut and Nakba Day.

Sincerely,

Rev. Steve Berube and Rev. Marianna Harris

Co-chairs: United Network for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel

Cc: Hon. Stephan Dion  
Hon. Rona Ambrose  
Hon. Thomas Mulcair  
Hon. Rhéal Fortin  
Hon. Elizabeth May  
Said Hamad: Chief Representative of the Palestinian Delegation in Canada