



Canadians Against Apartheid / Canadiens Contre L' apartheid

A Proposal for Canadian Human Rights Organizations and
Advocates

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“Canadians Against Apartheid”

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A proposal for human rights organizations and advocates to implement a cross-sector initiative to compel the Canadian government to address charges of Israeli apartheid.

Prepared by Philip Sherwood and Dr. Colter Louwarse, 17 April 2023

This proposal initially emerged from discussions that Peter Larson (OFIP), Michael Bueckert (CJPME), and Philip Sherwood (UNJPPI) had amongst themselves and with several people they met in Israel / Palestine during their delegation in October and November 2022.¹ It has since been elaborated on in communications among themselves and with other Canadian human rights advocates.

In brief, we (Philip and Colter) propose that Canadian advocacy groups join forces to sponsor a single-issue initiative / campaign designed to pressure / persuade the federal government to evaluate the charges of apartheid that numerous human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have levelled against Israel. This may be accomplished by creating a website where individuals and organizations could sign a petition or preferably send a letter. We believe the time is right for such an initiative as Israel’s far-right government is ever-more clearly exposing Israel’s apartheid policies and practices. It is also important that this window of opportunity is not missed as the “shelf life” of the human rights reports is not indefinite.

The initiative would specifically ask the federal government to:

- study the reports by Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), and others and evaluate their allegations of apartheid in the West Bank and Israel.
- share with Canadians and the human rights community the government’s evaluation of the allegations, including points of agreement and disagreement.
- ask the Minister of Global Affairs to recommend a proper course of action for Canada in consultation with other like-minded international partners.

¹ OFIP — Ottawa Forum Israel Palestine, CJPME — Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East), and UNJPPI — United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel. CJPME published vice-president Michael Bueckert’s report of the trip: https://www.cjpme.org/delegation_2022

The goal of the initiative would be to have so many people and organizations sign the petition / write a letter that the government and mainstream media could not ignore the campaign, thereby starting a long overdue national conversation / debate and breaking the official silence on the topic.

A disclaimer. Neither of us are experienced at organizing advocacy campaigns. However, we think the core ideas have merit and deserve consideration by those who do. In some instances, we have painted with broad strokes, and in others our wording may be imperfect. Nevertheless, we hope the main thrust of our reasoning is clear.

Rationale for such an initiative

➤ **The “ask” is not overreaching.**

It is designed to make it easy for individuals to support the initiative and difficult for the government to reject. Signatories are not required to believe that Israel is an apartheid state. They need only oppose apartheid in general and be sufficiently concerned to ask the government to investigate credible claims concerning Israel. Similarly, the initiative does not ask the government to declare Israel to be an apartheid state, but simply to evaluate the allegations made by several highly respected international human rights organizations and share the findings.

➤ **The initiative is in sync with significant sectors of Palestinian thinking.**

During the 2022 delegation, we spoke to several Palestinians who agreed that focusing on Israeli apartheid would be a viable strategy for effective advocacy in western countries. These included human rights lawyers, a journalist / intellectual, and Sami Abu Shehadeh, former member of the Knesset and leader of the Balad (National Democratic Assembly) party.

Moreover, Palestinian human rights organizations such as Al-Haq, Al Mezan, and Kairos Palestine are at the forefront of efforts to promote international recognition of and action against Israeli apartheid. There are even indications that the Palestinian Authority might gravitate towards the apartheid paradigm, particularly in United Nations forums.²

² <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/palestine-un-envoy-wears-end-israel-apartheid-mask-un-security-council>

➤ **Most Canadians oppose apartheid.**³

Apartheid is clearly defined as a crime against humanity in international law, and individuals of conscience no matter their race, ethnicity, or religion are against it. One advocate observed, “Even many Zionists must be against apartheid. How could they openly support it?” For anti-apartheid Canadians, supporting this initiative should hopefully not be a stretch.

➤ **The Canadian government positions itself as a defender of global human rights.**

Last December, Prime Minister Trudeau issued a statement on International Human Rights Day. Some excerpts:

Defending human rights and democracy has always been, and will continue to be, a priority for Canada – both here at home and around the world. Today, on Human Rights Day, we reaffirm our commitment to building a world where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, regardless of who they are or where they live. . .

Canada continues to play an active role in global human rights efforts and will always denounce abuses no matter where they occur.

Such statements are hard to square with Canada’s longstanding support for Israeli practices in the occupied and annexed Palestinian territories, a juxtaposition which is liable to become embarrassing if subjected to the glare of public scrutiny.

➤ **The government’s silence concerning charges of Israeli apartheid is deafening.**

Canadian officials no doubt understand that to defend Israeli policies towards the Palestinians is to defend the indefensible. The 2022 delegation met in Ramallah with the Representative of Canada to the Palestinian Authority. The meeting was on the record, and during it members queried the Representative and the Mission’s political officer about the findings of the AI and HRW reports. Both declined to discuss the reports, confining their comments to stating that “Canada does not think that Israel is an apartheid state.”

When pressed as to *why* the government has taken this position, they again declined to elaborate. It seemed they were aware that this position cannot stand scrutiny. Documents obtained by CJPME through Freedom of Information Request appear to confirm this suspicion, indicating that, even *internally*, the government has failed to formulate “any ... rationale” for its dismissal of reports documenting Israeli apartheid.⁴

³ In the context of this proposal, the term “Canadian” refers to citizens, permanent residents, and anyone legally entitled to reside in Canada.

⁴ https://www.cjpme.org/2022_timeline_amnesty_atip

Demanding a government study and public assessment of the allegations of apartheid would confront Canadian politicians and parties with a choice that most have hitherto largely avoided: go on record making an internationally embarrassing defense of the indefensible or acknowledge the reality of Israeli apartheid.

➤ **Much of the work has been done for us.**

Several respected human rights organizations have recently published exhaustive reports meticulously documenting Israeli apartheid. We are indebted to them. These include:

Yesh Din (2020)
B'Tselem (2021)
Al-Mezan (2021)
Human Rights Watch (2021)
Amnesty International (2022)
Al-Haq (2022)

Additional reputable reports have been written and / or published by:

- Kairos Palestine (2022)
- Michael Lynk, former Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 (2022)
- Virginia Tilley and Richard Falk (former Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967), ESCWA, (2017)

There are many, many, others.⁵

These ground-breaking reports, which constitute a global human rights consensus on the applicability of the apartheid framework to Israel, are the heart of this initiative. They are credible and cannot be easily dismissed, although Israel and the Canadian government have tried to do so. Advocates need no longer rely on their own research to make the point that Israel is an apartheid state as the work has already been done. We can integrate these reports into our advocacy activities, as this initiative proposes.

⁵ A fairly comprehensive listing of respected organizations and notable individuals who have documented the charge of Israeli apartheid can be found here: https://www.cjpmc.org/apartheid_list

- **Coalescing around one, clearly defined issue — Israeli apartheid — can attract as many supporters of Palestinian human rights as possible.**

Canadians critical of Israel's policies and practices have varying perspectives. Some simply want an end to the occupation. Some support a two-state solution, others a single state. Some see settler colonialism and Zionist ideology as the root of the problem, others don't. Some support the return of refugees, others don't. Some support Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), others don't.

Application of the apartheid framework to Israel does not directly broach these differences and disagreements. Focusing on apartheid can therefore be unifying as most, if not all, Canadian critics of Israel oppose apartheid, agree that the accusations against Israel are worthy of public discussion, and hopefully would be willing to back this campaign.

- **Several sponsoring organizations will give the initiative more clout, exposure, and traction than a single-sponsor initiative and attract more support.**

Currently, many organizations support the apartheid designation and include it in their advocacy work. Specifically, Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) has mounted their *Together Against Apartheid* campaign. While much needed, the problem, as we see it, is that no one organization has enough political clout to alone compel the government to address the issue. So far, the government has ignored allegations of apartheid against one of its closest allies simply because it can — there is no political cost to doing so. A campaign sponsored by several organizations and endorsed by many more would mobilize the broadest possible swathe of the public, making the campaign much harder to ignore.

As well, many potential signatories might be reluctant to support an initiative sponsored by a single organization. Taking the case of IJV, someone might not know much about IJV or might not want to get involved because "I'm not Jewish." Or they may disagree with some of IJV's specific positions (such as on BDS) and not want to be seen to endorse them by signing.

A one-issue, stand-alone, clearly defined initiative actively sponsored by five to ten (or more) advocacy groups, might make it easier for people to sign, as they are not endorsing a group, but a specific issue. No one group claims ownership of the initiative.

- **The campaign would not consume the resources of the sponsoring organizations.**

As we see it, the main investment in time, finances, and effort would be setting up and promoting a standalone, bilingual web site with an explanation of the campaign, links to resources, and an easy-to-use hackproof petition / letter writing mechanism that would guarantee the integrity of the results.⁶

⁶ The authors tentatively prefer a letter-writing campaign. We have been told that MPs feel free to ignore Israel/Palestine as they do not hear much, if anything, from their constituents about it. We have also been

A resource section on the website could provide links to background material so that the undecided could learn more. Much of the promoting could be done via social media and on a grassroots level.

➤ **The initiative could embolden MPs to promote the issue more aggressively.**

A base of latent support exists in Parliament for labelling Israel an apartheid state. The NDP has publicly endorsed the findings and recommendations of human rights organizations vis-a-vis Israeli apartheid.⁷ A large demonstration of popular Canadian support for investigating claims of Israeli apartheid might compel the NDP to turn rhetorical endorsement into tangible political pressure.

➤ **The time is NOW.**

Israel's current government is the most extreme yet. During the 2022 delegation, many Palestinians accurately predicted that it would lay bare the horrors of the apartheid enterprise for the world to see. Who would have imagined that a cabinet minister would openly deny the existence of the Palestinian people and call for the eradication of a Palestinian town? Or that Israeli commentators would describe atrocities against Palestinians as a pogrom? Tragically, this government is making it easier for us to effectively advocate. Defenders of Israeli policies and practices are having a difficult time.

As well, the “shelf life” of the various human rights reports is not indefinite. The AI report is already a year old. It will be much harder to rely on them in three or four years, as they will appear dated.

These human rights organizations have provided us with invaluable tools. Our responsibility is to use them as effectively as possible.

A final thought

The initiative would not be a long-term education campaign, but rather focus on mobilizing those who already have some understanding and concern about the situation.

We believe that a lot of support already exists for an initiative such as this.

Continuing education is important, but it could take years, and that's assuming there are sufficient educators and resources. However, a successful campaign will, by virtue of its publicity, educate the public and possibly attract new supporters.

assured that letter-writing remains one of the most effective grassroots' tools for lobbying MPs and the government, as opposed, say, to social media campaigns.

⁷ [NDP: defend Singh's Palestine solidarity and withdraw from Canada-Israel Interparliamentary Group - Spring \(springmag.ca\)](https://springmag.ca)

Our hope / ask / recommendations

- The above will contribute to and stimulate the broader conversation about how best to leverage the human rights reports to pressure the Canadian government to acknowledge and investigate claims of Israeli apartheid.
- Members of Canadian human rights organizations will discuss this proposal internally and decide if they wish to be part of a cross-sector initiative. If so, that they reach out to like-minded organizations and discuss how best to work together.
- One or more of the more established advocacy organizations consider taking on the logistical responsibilities of bringing advocacy groups together, establishing a consensus, and developing and implementing a campaign.

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In summary, we believe that a united, focused, stand-alone, and clearly defined initiative about an issue — apartheid — that Canadians of conscience understand and abhor, applied to the Israeli context and sponsored and / or endorsed by several organizations, has a real potential to achieve sufficient exposure, public support, and political traction to compel the government to address the issue. The time is now, while Israel's apartheid government is on full display, Israel's apologists are in disarray, and the human rights reports are fresh.

(signed)

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Israeli Apartheid

"With the eyes of the international community wide open, Israel has imposed upon Palestine an apartheid reality in a post-apartheid world."

—UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk, 2022

"The crime against humanity of apartheid is being committed in the West Bank. The perpetrators are Israelis, and the victims are Palestinians. . . . The Israeli regime in its entirety is an apartheid regime. Israel is an Apartheid state."

— *The Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and the Crime of Apartheid*. Yesh Din, 2020

"In the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the Israeli regime implements laws, practices, and state violence designed to cement the supremacy of one group — Jews — over another — Palestinians.

" . . . These accumulated measures all form the basis for our conclusion that the bar for labeling the Israeli regime as apartheid has been met."

— *A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid*. B'Tselem, January 2021

"On the basis of its research, *Human Rights Watch* concludes that the Israeli government has demonstrated an intent to maintain the domination of Jewish Israelis over Palestinians. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, this intent has been coupled with systemic oppression of Palestinians and inhumane acts committed against them. When these three elements occur together, they amount to the crime of apartheid."

— *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*.

— Human Rights Watch, April 2021

"Israel's actions in the occupied West Bank are in breach of the prohibition of apartheid and amount to the crime of apartheid under international law."

— *Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association and the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School*. February 2022,

"Israel has established and maintained an institutionalized regime of oppression and domination of the Palestinian population for the benefit of Jewish Israelis — a system of apartheid — wherever it has exercised control over Palestinians' lives since 1948."

— *Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity*. Amnesty International, February 2022

"The time has come to call a spade a spade: An apartheid regime is the name given in international law by the international community to a regime of the type that Israel is maintaining in the occupied territories."

— Yehudit Karp, former Israeli deputy attorney general, October 2021

"The product of Zionism, the State of Israel, is not a Jewish and democratic state but instead has become an apartheid state, plain and simple."

— Amos Schocken, publisher of the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, December 2021

Resources

Amnesty International *Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity*. Amnesty International.
<https://www.amnesty.ca/news/israels-apartheid-against-palestinians-a-cruel-system-of-domination-and-a-crime-against-humanity/>

Human Rights Watch *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*. <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*. <https://www.btselem.org/apartheid>

Al-Mezan *The Gaza Bantustan—Israeli Apartheid in the Gaza Strip*.
<https://mezan.org/uploads/files/16381763051929.pdf>

Al-Haq *Israeli Apartheid: Tool of Zionist Settler Colonialism*.
<https://www.alhaq.org/publications/20940.html>

Yesh Din *The Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and the Crime of Apartheid: Legal Opinion* Yesh Din <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/Apartheid+2020/Apartheid+ENG.pdf>

Kairos Palestine *A Dossier on Israeli Apartheid*
<https://www.kairospalestine.ps/images/kp-a-dossier-on-israeli-apartheid-main.pdf>

Michael Lynk Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, (2022) <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/448/72/PDF/G2244872.pdf?OpenElement>

Virginia Tilley and Richard Falk *Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid*, ESCWA, 2017 <https://oldwebsite.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/ESCWA%202017%20%28Richard%20Falk%29%2C%20Apartheid.pdf>