

## **FACTSHEET: CANADA'S RECENT BIAS TOWARD ISRAEL IN UNITED NATIONS VOTING**



### **How are decisions regarding Israel/Palestine made at the UN?**

The General Assembly (GA) was created in 1945 and is “the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations.”<sup>1</sup> As such, it is the proper forum to develop consensus on key international issues. The GA is comprised of all 192 members of the UN, all of whom have a single vote. The GA meets once a year for several months in the Fall to discuss and vote on resolutions. Every year since its creation, the GA has voted on a series of resolutions regarding Israel/Palestine. The number of those resolutions has increased considerably over the years. In 1946, for instance, one resolution was brought forth; in 2007, there were 18. For a resolution to pass it requires a simple majority.<sup>2</sup>

### **What is the Canadian government's official policy on Palestine-Israel?**

Canada publicly documents its official positions on all the contentious issues relating to Palestine-Israel on its Foreign Affairs Website. Canada also defends many of its past UN Emergency Session votes on this Website. According to the Ministry, Canada officially supports a two-state solution and recognizes Israel's right to security as well as a “democratic, independent and viable Palestinian state.”<sup>3</sup>

Canada also claims to support Israel's obligations under international law. Canada does not officially sanction Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem or recognize permanent Israeli control over the territory occupied in the 1967 war (i.e., the Golan Heights, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip). It acknowledges the colonization of the Occupied Territories as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and “a serious obstacle to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.”<sup>4</sup> Canada also officially opposes the construction of the apartheid wall inside the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Foreign Affairs also asserts that Israel is unfairly singled out in many resolutions. It argues that the ‘primary precursor’ to peace is cessation of violence on both sides,<sup>5</sup> and it routinely votes against resolutions that it feels censure Israel while not similarly singling out what it regards as unjustifiable acts of Palestinian violence.

### **How has Canada's UN voting on the Middle East changed since 2004?**

While Canada continues to vote in favour of resolutions that provide aid for Palestinian refugees (62/105, 62/104, 62/102), and while it continues to vote against Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem and its concomitant colonies (62/108, 62/84), in the last four years the Canadian vote has largely moved away from support for Palestinian security and self-determination. Indeed, the last four years have seen a shift from ‘Yes’ votes to Abstentions and ‘No’ votes, placing Canada firmly in the *minority* of the international community in terms of Israel/OPT.

The following summarizes Canada's voting changes to favour Israel over recent years:

#### **2007: Shifts to ‘No’ vote since 2004:**

- 62/82: Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine
- 62/109: Israeli Practices affecting the Human Rights of Palestinians
- 62/85: Syrian Golan: Israel's Occupation is Illegal
- 62/181: Permanent Sovereignty of the Palestinian People
- 62/106: Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories
- 62/80: Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable rights of Palestinians — Requesting the Committee to Continue its Work

#### **2007: Shifts to Abstentions since 2004:**

- 62/83: Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine
- 62/103: Persons Displaced as a result of June 1967 and Subsequent Hostilities
- 62/146: Rights of the Palestinian People to Self-Determination<sup>6</sup>

## Is Canada's UNGA voting rationale defensible?

The Canadian government offers only sporadic Explanations of Votes (EOVs) to justify its UN positions, but those Explanations argue a consistent claim over the last 4 years: that there is an 'imbalance' in UN resolutions and that Israel's security is not being adequately addressed.

Regarding the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination (62/146), Canada insists – in what emerges as a common refrain in the EOVs – that the resolution “does not adequately address the responsibilities of both parties to the conflict”<sup>7</sup>; regarding Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinians in the OPT, including East Jerusalem, Canada votes no because the resolution “does not condemn Palestinian violence.”<sup>8</sup> Canada voted no against the resolution supporting permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people for the vague reason that it “does not provide a balanced assessment of the situation.”<sup>9</sup>

On the crucial question of the Rights of Palestinian people to Self-Determination, Canada voted against it because once again, it claimed Palestinians are not afforded sufficient blame in the crisis.<sup>10</sup>

In all the above argumentation used by the current and past Canadian governments, there is a blindness to a key fact: that Israel is illegally occupying the land of its neighbours, Palestine and Syria. This occupation is illegal under international law (i.e., the UN Charter), and the Security Council has already mandated that Israel withdraw in Resolution 242 (1967.) Thus, while there is indeed unlawful violence on all sides, it exists in the context of the illegal Israeli occupation. For Canada to assert that Israel is being 'singled out' by the UN belies the fact that, by every measure of international law, Israel's bears the *legal* weight of responsibility for the crisis. To suggest that there is imbalance in UN voting would seem to suggest that the Palestinians are, in legal terms, equally responsible for the conflict, which they are not.

Canada is a signatory to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Both documents explicitly support the rights of peoples to self-determination. In this context, Canada's abstention on the question of the rights of the Palestinians' right to self-determination is perplexing. Indeed, as we've seen, as of 2007, Canada no longer supports resolutions defending the sovereignty of Palestinians, and it now abstains on the crucial question of the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination. It is uncertain how these 'No' or 'Abstention' votes support Canada's claim that it is in favour of a “democratic, independent and viable Palestinian state.”

Although Canada constantly reiterates its support for international law, and asserts Israel must act according to the edicts of international law, in fact Canada now votes firmly *against* several resolutions meant to ensure Israel's legal and humanitarian responsibilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (see above). Under the dictates of international humanitarian law—specifically the Geneva Conventions and the Hague Regulations, both of which Canada supports—it is the *occupier's* responsibilities which are paramount: it is Israel that has primary responsibility to minimize violence, and ultimately withdraw from the Golan (Syria), the West Bank, and Gaza. Thus, it is adherence to international law that will actually give rise to peace and security in the region, not subjective arguments about 'balance.' While Canada advances the paradoxical argument that Israel (the occupier) needs greater assurances of 'security' from the Palestinians (the occupied), the Palestinians continue to pay a far higher price for the occupation on all fronts: deaths, injuries, education, health, the economy, and civil rights and freedoms.

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine. (2008). UN Resolutions-General Assembly. Retrieved July 7, 2008, from <http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2008). Canada's policy on key issues in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Retrieved July 8, 2008, from [www.international.gc.ca/middle\\_east/can\\_policy-en.asp#13](http://www.international.gc.ca/middle_east/can_policy-en.asp#13)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine. (2008). UN Resolutions-General Assembly. Retrieved July 7, 2008, from <http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF>. The wording on some resolution titles does not give the full breadth of what is being debated; for more information on the specifics of each resolution, consult UNISPAL's website. It's also worth noting that of 20 main resolutions passed regarding Israel/Palestine in 2006, Canada was in the minority vote 12 times; in 2007 it was 13. Each year these key resolutions are passed with overwhelming majorities, and the minority vote, either in the form of No Votes or Abstentions, typically comes from the same handful of countries: the US, Israel, Australia, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Canada.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2008). Canada's policy on key issues in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Retrieved July 8, 2008, from [www.international.gc.ca/middle\\_east/can\\_policy-en.asp#13](http://www.international.gc.ca/middle_east/can_policy-en.asp#13).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.