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## **CJPME welcomes Israel-Hamas truce and cessation of Israel's siege of Gaza**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

MONTREAL, June 20, 2008 / – Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) welcomes the truce between Israel and Hamas that went into effect on the morning of June 19<sup>th</sup>. While the truce is still young, and there is scepticism on all sides of its ability to hold, the possible humanitarian benefits that may result would be significant.

“Canada and the West should have applied pressure long ago on Israel and Hamas alike to achieve such an agreement,” asserted Thomas Woodley of CJPME. “The fact that that the siege of Gaza by Israel was allowed to continue for so long is shameful,” Woodley continued. “Under international humanitarian law, Israel – with effective control over Gaza – has a legal responsibility for the humanitarian well-being of the civilian population in Gaza. When Canada and the West allow Israel to deny medical supplies, foodstuffs, fuel and other basic supplies to Gaza, they become party to the tragedy that unfolds there.”

Israel cites the Qassam rocket attacks from Gaza militant groups as justification for its siege of Gaza, and its concomitant airstrikes. Nevertheless, the number of Israelis killed by the homemade rockets is only about 15 since the rockets began in 2001, while Israeli strikes in Gaza have killed many hundreds of civilians during this same period. Israel also incites the on-going ire of Palestinians by maintaining an over 40-year military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

The agreement between Israel and Hamas, brokered by Egypt, allows the progressive opening of the border crossings by Israel as the truce continues to hold. While such steps are welcome and sorely needed, they are a far cry from the type of movement and access prescribed in the US-brokered November, 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. The previous agreement recognized the need for greater Palestinian flexibility of movement in the longer-term plan for regional justice, peace and security.

CJPME believes that Canada must develop a neutral Middle East policy that grapples with the realities of the region and its players. Says Woodley, “Canada must call *all* parties – Israel included – to a common standard of behaviour. All must renounce violence, respect prior agreements, and recognize one another’s aspirations to self-determination.”

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### **About CJPME**

*CJPME is a pan-Canadian grassroots advocacy organization uniting Canadians of all backgrounds who believe in justice, peace and security for all people in the Middle East. CJPME seeks to positively influence Canadian foreign policy in the Middle East and Canadian media coverage of the events and peoples of the region. CJPME values Canada’s historical role as a neutral broker in the Middle East, and wants to promote better understanding among Canadians of Middle Eastern issues and dynamics.*

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