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CJPME echoes concerns raised in Human Rights Watch Report concerning Palestinian Factions

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONTREAL, July 31, 2008 – Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) echoes the concerns documented by a recent (July 30) Human Rights Watch (HRW) report which documents human rights violations and other abuses perpetrated by security forces of both Fatah in the West Bank, and Hamas in Gaza. The report was issued during a recent spike in abuses by each side this week following several bomb attacks in Gaza last weekend.

The report holds both Palestinian factions – Fatah and Hamas – accountable for very similar abuses, citing data and findings from over the past year. The report provided recommendations for the Palestinian authorities in both the West Bank and Gaza in the areas of torture, arbitrary arrest, violations of due process, monitoring of detention facilities, impunity and accountability, and judicial institutions.

“It’s absolutely essential that international law in these areas be respected,” asserted Thomas Woodley of CJPME. “We would hope that the leadership of the two principal Palestinian factions, as well as the international community would take the findings of this report very seriously.” The report also called for external actors to exert influence on the two Palestinian factions to prevent continued abuses. The report made recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council, the Quartet, and other international donors and players to use all influence to help halt the abuses.

The Palestinian Unity Government established in March, 2007 between Fatah and Hamas fell apart in June, 2007 after Hamas took exclusive control of Gaza. Since that time, both sides have committed many abuses against activists and institutions of the other faction. Many attribute the demise of the Unity Government to international players seeking to bolster the strength of Fatah during the relative détente of the Unity Government period.

“What is additionally tragic about the situation is how each faction has also targeted the civil, social, and cultural institutions established by the other,” lamented Woodley. Just this past week, Hamas officials in Gaza closed more than 100 civic associations, charities and sports clubs accused of having links to Fatah. Fatah has similarly targeted Hamas institutions in the West Bank. Joe Stork, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch, was quoted as saying, “Security forces from both sides have targeted activists and organizations of the other party. Their abusive behaviour has victimized Palestinians from all walks of life and weakened the rule of law.”

As an international player maintaining relations with at least one of the two parties involved in the abuses, CJPME calls on Canada to heed the HRW recommendations for international donors to the Palestinians.

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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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