

Canada's Concern for Detainees in Israel-Palestine Unbalanced

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

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Montreal, June 27, 2011 — In a strongly-worded statement Friday, June 24, Canada's foreign minister John Baird called for the immediate and unconditional release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Baird also called for Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which captured Shalit five years ago, to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross immediate access to Shalit. Shalit was captured during an attack on an army base in southern Israel by Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups June 25, 2006. He has been denied any meaningful contact with the outside world since.

Neither Minister Baird's June 24 statement, nor any other statement issued in recent years by Canada's foreign affairs ministers, mention any of the 5,383 Palestinians currently imprisoned by Israeli authorities. Approximately 219 are in "administrative detention"-detention ordered by the occupying military authorities, without judicial proceedings. Such detentions can be extended indefinitely by the military authorities without judicial proceedings. According to Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, over the years Israel has administratively detained thousands of Palestinians for prolonged periods of time without prosecuting them. It has done so without informing them of the charges against them, and without allowing them or their attorneys to study the evidence. This violates several provisions of international law.

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) supports the call for Gilad Shalit's release. However, CJPME is deeply concerned by the Canadian government's unbalanced approach to detainees in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "Gilad Shalit should be immediately released, but the Canadian government should also call for the release of Palestinian prisoners detained without charge," says CJPME President Thomas Woodley. CJPME notes that many Palestinian prisoners have received harsh sentences for peaceful protests or for relatively minor offences, such as throwing stones at tanks. "Canada should also be pressing the Israeli government to release prisoners under the age of 18," add Woodley. CJPME notes that 37 Palestinians under 16 and 180 between 16 and 18 years of age were being held by the Israeli authorities as of April 30.

Shalit — an Israeli prisoner of war — was captured during a raid on an Israeli military base enforcing Israel's control of Gaza. He was the first Israeli soldier to be captured by Palestinians since 1994. Hamas has offered to release Shalit in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, especially those who are female or underage. Holding prisoners indefinitely, or holding them for ransom is unlawful.

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