

Change in Canada's UN Vote Not Enough to Help Palestinian Refugees Under Attack

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

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Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) welcomes Canada's renewed support for a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution on Palestinian refugees, but warns that this lone vote is insufficient in the face of the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza. On November 9, Canada voted in the UNGA's Fourth Committee for a draft resolution in support of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestine refugees, after abstaining since 2011. However, in the same meeting, Canada voted against four other resolutions, including two supporting Palestine refugees and one condemning Israeli settlements. CJPME warns that Canada's less-than-half-hearted approach indicates that it is not serious about addressing the human catastrophe that Israel is creating in Gaza.

"Today's vote is a necessary correction. It was always absurd for Canada to abstain on UNRWA while giving millions in donations to the agency every year," said Thomas Woodley, President of CJPME. "However, this is hardly a step forward. Any positive message that Canada intends to send with this vote is vastly outweighed by its continued opposition to every other motion on UNRWA and Palestine refugees," added Woodley.

CJPME notes that although Canada is a financial supporter of UNRWA, it has failed to directly condemn Israel for its attacks on UNRWA schools, which have killed over 90 UNRWA staff. More than 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza have been forcibly displaced since October 7, and many thousands are sheltering in UNRWA facilities, which have been repeatedly bombed.

The resolutions which Canada voted against during today's session include:

1. A resolution which recognizes UNRWA and urges the international community to support its work. It passed 160-4.

2. A resolution which reaffirms that Palestinian refugees are entitled to their property, and asks the UN to protect Arab assets and property rights in Israel. It passed 156-6.

3. A resolution to condemn Israel's illegal settlements in occupied Palestinian territory. It passed 145-7.

"It is shocking that Canada would vote in support of Israeli settlements in a year of unprecedented settlement expansion, and as attacks by Israeli settlers and soldiers have forcibly displaced at least 15 herding communities in the West Bank. Israel's ongoing colonization of Palestinian land is directly creating new refugees, with Canada's support," said Woodley.

There are 10-16 standing resolutions on Palestinian human rights which are considered by the UNGA each year. Although in the early 2000s Canada voted in support of nearly all of them, this approach radically changed under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who in 2011 began voting against nearly every one of these resolutions as a package. In 2019, Trudeau made a small shift by resuming Canada's vote in favour of a single resolution on Palestinian self-determination. Last year, CJPME published a report titled "Voting Against Its Own Interests," which revealed that career foreign affairs officials have warned the government behind the scenes that its staunchly pro-Israel voting record at the United Nations contradicts its own values and interests and harms its international reputation. CJPME's UN Dashboard is an interactive resource which shows how Canada's votes on these motions have changed from 2000 to the present.

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Featured image: Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) holds press conference in Jerusalem on October 27, 2023 [Mostafa Alkharouf/Anadolu Agency]

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