

Statement: Canada must suspend arms trade with Israel

As Israel continues its bombardment of Gaza, which has resulted in a devastating number of civilian deaths, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) are calling on the Canadian government to immediately suspend the trade of arms and military equipment with Israel.

More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israel's bombardment of Gaza. This is in response to the October 7 Hamas attack in Israel, which killed approximately 1,200 people, mostly innocent civilians. Over 200 people were taken as hostages, including children. An estimated 100 remain in captivity, and their families and communities are suffering. A ceasefire is urgently needed to ensure Israeli civilians return home safely and to end the devastation and deaths in Gaza.

The majority of Palestinians killed by Israeli airstrikes in Gaza are civilians. An alarming proportion—about one-third of them—are children. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been injured and about 2 million people displaced. There are increasing reports of widespread shortages of humanitarian aid, and of people facing starvation and disease. We have seen disturbing reports of attacks on civilians and infrastructure, including health care facilities. Now, the Israeli military is threatening a ground invasion at Rafah. Yet over 1 million Palestinians had been told to relocate to Rafah when fleeing Israeli airstrikes in northern Gaza.

Canada exports military equipment to Israel, including via the United States. This means that Canada is at risk of being complicit in the violence and human rights violations Israel is perpetrating in Gaza. Canada also imports military equipment from Israel, which anti-war groups argue supports Israel's military industry and operations.

Building on the urgent appeals for a permanent ceasefire and humanitarian relief, there are growing calls from trade unions, civil society, humanitarian organizations, and elected leaders around the world for an arms embargo on Israel to help put an end to the catastrophic violence in Gaza. Other countries, including Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands, have suspended arms transfers to Israel.

[United Nations human rights experts](#) have sounded the alarm, warning that sending Israel weapons, ammunition, or parts that would be used in Gaza is likely a violation of international humanitarian law. Under international treaties, countries—including

Canada—have legal obligations to refrain from sending weapons, ammunition, or parts if it's expected that they will be used to violate international law. Governments are also required to reject weapons export permits if the weapons could be used to commit violence against women and children.

The recent International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling, which confirmed a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza and ordered Israel to prevent acts of genocide, adds further weight and urgency to our obligations. As a signatory to the Genocide Convention, Canada is required to comply with the ICJ ruling and to take all possible steps to prevent a genocide in another country.

Recent data obtained by [The Maple](#) found that the Canadian government approved \$28.5 million worth of military exports to Israel between October and December 2023.

In March, following the non-binding motion in the House of Commons, the Canadian government committed to pausing its approval of future arms export permits to Israel. This is an important first step towards a complete arms embargo.

We urge the Canadian government to immediately suspend trade in arms and military equipment with Israel, in accordance with Canada's legal obligations. Canada must impose an arms embargo to help end the horrors in Gaza.

Moreover, we reiterate our calls on the Canadian government:

- Work towards an immediate and permanent ceasefire.
- Call for the safe return of the civilian hostages held captive by Hamas.
- Strongly urge the government of Israel to comply with the ICJ ruling to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza and prevent and punish direct and public incitement to genocide.
- Ensure the safe flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza, including restoring Canada's funding to UNRWA.
- Call for an end to the occupation of Palestinian territory as a critical step towards a just and lasting peace in the region.

Our hope is that these measures will help support long-term political solutions to ensure peace and security for both Palestinians and Israelis, and all people in the region.