

December 31, 2008

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Canada

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Re: Situation in Gaza

Dear Prime Minister:

We urge your government to support international efforts to establish an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The humanitarian cost of the current crisis is deeply troubling, particularly to children and other civilians. We fear that a continuation and even deepening of the assault and rocket firing could have grave consequences for the people of Gaza and southern Israel.

It is the most vulnerable—children and other civilians—who experience the greatest suffering in these situations. In the current attack on Gaza, dozens of children have been killed or injured, adding to the more than 1,000 Palestinian and more than 100 Israeli children who have been killed in the conflict since 2000. Furthermore, an untold number of children in Gaza and southern Israel live in fear as a result of the broken ceasefire. We mourn for all those killed and are deeply concerned with the lasting impact of this violence on the affected populations.

World Vision has consistently called for all sides to refrain from violence. Moreover, we have called for an end to the 18 month blockade of 1.5 million Palestinians, which has devastated the Gazan economy, halted services, and rendered its people to be entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance. The current bombardment comes at a time when the Gazan population is already severely afflicted, living in dire poverty.

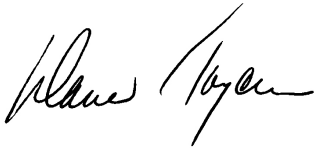
In Gaza, World Vision programs benefit thousands of children. Our staff is doing its utmost to continue to serve these children, their families and communities, despite severely limited humanitarian access. World Vision and other international agencies attest to the severe psychological and physical stress children are experiencing. Children comprise more than half of the population of Gaza. The ongoing attacks will only worsen their situation.

It is the responsibility of all parties to this conflict to protect the rights of children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that States Parties have an obligation under international humanitarian law to protect children. Israel, as a signatory to the Convention, must take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict. Non-state actors, such as Hamas, are also bound by provisions in international law that uphold the special rights of children to protection. Canada should call on all parties to do their utmost to protect the rights of all children in this situation.

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We appeal to your government to more vigorously engage in efforts to bring about an immediate ceasefire. Once a ceasefire is in place, urgent efforts must be taken to renew a process aimed at securing a lasting solution to this long standing conflict. We also urge you to address the humanitarian needs that will be created by the current violence, including emergency medical supplies, food supplies and infrastructure rebuilding. Canada should work with Israel to help ensure that humanitarian agencies are allowed unfettered access to civilian populations in order to address these needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Toyen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dave" being more prominent than the last name "Toyen".

Dave Toyen
President and CEO

cc. Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Honourable Bryon Wilfert, Foreign Affairs Critic, Official Opposition