

Canada's NDP's Claim to 'Dialogue' with Palestinians a Cruel Joke

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The NDP is refusing to [heed a call](#) from 200 well-known musicians, academics, trade unionists and party members to withdraw from the Canada-Israel Interparliamentary Group (CIIG). To justify its decision the party says it is also represented on the Canada-Palestine Parliamentary Friendship Group (CPPFG).

In response to the open letter signed by Roger Waters, Maher Arar, Noam Chomsky, Linda McQuaig, etc. calling on NDP MPs to withdraw from CIIG, anti-Palestinian groups jumped to the party's defence. In a *Canadian Jewish News* [article](#) about the open letter CIIG chair Michael Levitt — a former board member of the [explicitly racist](#) Jewish National Fund and co-author of a recent statement blaming " [Hamas incitement](#)" for Israeli forces shooting thousands of peaceful protesters, including Canadian doctor Tarek Loubani — called CIIG executives Murray Rankin and Randall Garrison "mensches" and said he's "very supportive" of their role in the group. For its part, the staunchly anti-Palestinian Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center (FSWC) released a statement defending "[the federal](#) NDP's decision to not withdraw from the Canada-Israel Interparliamentary Group despite pressure from party members."

In response to the open letter NDP officials told the [Huffington Post](#), [Hill Times](#) and others they were also represented on CPPFG. Caucus Press Secretary Kathryn LeBlanc sent me a statement noting,

"NDP MPs belong to both the Canada-Israel Interparliamentary Group and the Canada-Palestine Parliamentary Friendship Group. The NDP believes dialogue is the way forward to establish peace, security and justice for Palestinian and Israeli people."

But, the claim that belonging to these two committees creates some sort of neutral balance between Israelis and Palestinians conjures up famed South African activist Desmond Tutu's insight that

"[if you are neutral](#) in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

In the case of South African apartheid the NDP never claimed this sort of "dialogue is the way forward to establish peace, security and justice." The party supported boycotts,

divestment and sanctions against South Africa to put non-violent pressure on the country to end a regime that oppressed millions.

And even the NDP's claim to balance and "dialogue" by belonging to both committees is disingenuous at best.

The Canada-Palestine group isn't one of [17 official](#) parliamentary associations or groups so it [doesn't receive](#) public support, unlike the Canada-Israel group. Without official parliamentary status, the CPPFG has few resources and little influence. [Established in 2007](#), it went defunct and was only re-constituted last year with [nine MPs](#), including one initial NDP member (at least one more NDP MP has joined since the re-launch). The Israel Interparliamentary group, on the other hand, was created in 1981 and has [88 MPs](#) and Senators, including four NDP members.

CIIG works with a sister organization in Israel, the 13-member Israel-Canada Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group. The two groups organize joint teleconferences and delegations to each other's parliaments. As I [detailed](#), the co-chairs of the Israel-Canada Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group, Yoel Hasson and Anat Berko, are stridently anti-Palestinian.

CPPFG, on the other hand, works with representatives of a people without control of territory and whose politicians are often locked in Israeli jails. Dozens of Palestinian representatives Israel detains can't "dialogue" with their NDP counterparts through CPPFG. A recent CPPFG inspired Canadian parliamentary delegation to the West Bank wasn't able to meet with Palestinian Legislative Council member Khalida Jarrar, whose daughters have been active in Palestine solidarity campaigning in Canada, since she has been detained by Israel for most of the past three years and has been blocked from traveling internationally since 1998.

It's unclear if the Canadian MPs would have been allowed to meet Jarrar even if she weren't detained by Israel since she is a member of the [secular leftist](#) Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Like most Palestinian political organizations, the PFLP is a banned terrorist organization in Canada. Ottawa's post-September 11 2001 [terrorist list](#) makes it illegal to assist the PFLP, Palestine Liberation Front, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, Abu Nidal Organization, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas and groups associated with these organizations.

Instead of these groups, CPPFG is aligned with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA). According to PA allied media, its re-launch was "[coordinated with](#) the Palestinian General Commission in Canada" and the recent CPPFG inspired delegation of MPs to the West Bank was organized "[in coordination](#) between the Palestinian National Authority."

Heavily dependent on Western funding and Israeli support, the PA has been labeled the "[subcontractor](#) of the Occupation" (some believe even that's too charitable, calling the PA "[in lock step](#)" with Israel's occupation). Since the Harper government took over in 2006 [half a billion](#) dollars in Canadian aid money has gone to the PA in an explicit bid to strengthen it *vis-à-vis* political rival Hamas and to entrench Israel's occupation.

"[There have](#) been increasing references in the past months during high-level bilateral meetings with the Israelis about the importance and value they place on Canada's assistance to the Palestinian Authority, most notably in security/justice reform," read a heavily censored November 2012 note signed

by former Canadian International Development Agency president Margaret Biggs. “The Israelis have noted the importance of Canada’s contribution to the relative stability achieved through extensive security co-operation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.”

The note released through an Access to Information request suggests the goal of Canadian “aid” was to protect a corrupt Abbas, whose electoral mandate expired in 2009, from popular backlash. Biggs explained that

“the emergence of popular protests on the Palestinian street against the Palestinian Authority is worrying and the Israelis have been imploring the international donor community to continue to support the Palestinian Authority.”

The [Shin Bet vetted](#), [CIA connected](#) and Canadian, US and British trained PA security forces have repeatedly quelled protests opposing Israeli violence in Gaza and expansionism in the West Bank. In the latest iteration, two weeks ago PA forces [fired stun grenades](#) and teargas on a peaceful demonstration calling for the easing of punitive economic measures in Gaza. An Amnesty International staff member was arbitrarily detained and tortured alongside 18 others in what the rights group labeled a “[vicious crackdown](#)”.

After returning from the recent PA coordinated visit to the West Bank Green Party leader Elizabeth May and NDP MP Alexandre Boulerice both said the Palestinians they talked [didn’t support](#) the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (the PA’s position). The delegation did not meet anyone from the Palestinian BDS National Committee, which dubs itself “[the broadest](#) Palestinian civil society coalition that works to lead and support the BDS movement for Palestinian rights.” Nor did they [go to Gaza](#).

Claiming to be dialoguing with both sides through CPPFG and CIIG is a cruel joke. The NDP should [heed 200](#) well-known musicians, academics, trade unionists and party members’ call to withdraw from the Canada-Israel Interparliamentary Group.

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