

Canadian Aid to Yemen Is a Humanitarian Band-aid

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Too often international “aid” seems to be like the rich and powerful buying “indulgences” to atone for their sins in medieval times. Certainly it is commonly doled out to gloss over global inequities. It’s definitely a tool Ottawa employs to present itself as generous while sustaining unequal corporate and imperial power structures that benefit Canada.

At a recent donor meeting the Canadian government pledged \$70 million for Yemen. To explain the donation Minister of International Development **Karina Gould** declared,

“[Yemen](#) is undergoing the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, and its people deserve decisive action. Their suffering must end, and their rights and dignity must be protected. We must do everything possible to make this happen.”

But Gould’s “everything possible” doesn’t include stopping Canada from fueling a six-year-old Saudi-led war that has left over [100,000](#) Yemenis dead. In response to the international development minister’s announcement World Beyond War Canada’s Rachel Small tweeted, “[genuinely](#) floored by the hypocrisy. \$295 million in aid to Yemen since 2015 is a drop in the bucket compared to \$6 billion in weapons Canada exported to Saudi Arabia in the same period. As Karina Gould knows the most important action needed for Yemen is for Canada to stop arming Saudi Arabia.”

According to Statistics Canada data for January, Canadian armoured vehicle sales reached a whopping [\\$487 million](#), the largest ever monthly total. Canada also exported [\\$4.8 million](#) worth of “arms and ammunition” to the Saudis in January. Additionally, Montreal-based flight simulator company CAE has [trained](#) Saudi pilots in numerous locales. “[Under Trudeau](#), Canada Is Saudi Arabia’s Most Dedicated Gunrunner”, explains a recent article by Kelsey Gallagher of Project Ploughshares.

In a sign of the depraved state of Liberal discourse, Canada’s ambassador to the UN, **Bob Rae**, simply denies it all. He recently claimed, “[we don’t](#) sell arms to any of the parties to the conflict” in Yemen while six months ago Rae responded to a UN report that documented Canada’s role in fueling the conflict by labeling Canadian exported armoured vehicles “jeeps”. “[It’s not](#) what you’d call a weapon,” he said.

Alongside the weapon deliveries, the Liberals have mostly ignored Saudi violence in Yemen.

They have rarely criticized Saudi bombing and when they have it has been in polite terms.

At best Canada's aid to Yemen is a bandage on a humanitarian catastrophe spurred by a war Ottawa fuels.

A similar dynamic is at play with Canadian aid for international COVID-19 support. In December Canada put up [\\$485 million](#) to help impoverished nations access vaccines. But Ottawa has hoarded vaccines, having amassed enough to inoculate the entire Canadian population five times over. More troublingly, the government has refused to support a World Trade Organization (WTO) proposal calling for a temporary waiver of certain rules on intellectual property rights to allow poor countries to produce COVID-19 vaccines. The World Health Organization and over [100 countries](#) back the "Waiver from certain provisions of the TRIPS Agreement for the Prevention, Containment and Treatment of COVID-19". Canada and a number of other rich countries are refusing to support an initiative opposed by Big Pharma. Under mounting pressure over the five-month-old proposal, the Trudeau government now denies it opposes the patent waiver, claiming it simply wants more information about the effectiveness of the proposal. In the meantime, the initiative has been repeatedly put off and much of the Global South has little access to COVID vaccines.

Canada's COVID donation masks Ottawa's unwillingness to challenge Big Pharma and the broader intellectual property rights lobby.

Individual aid projects are often helpful (though many are not). Still, progressives shouldn't spend time calling for more aid. In a just world, transfer payments from wealthier regions to poorer ones would smooth out inequities. But, in the here and now it's important to be cautious about feeding 'more Canada' ideology that enables destructive, interventionist, policies.

Rather than pushing for more aid, progressives should challenge corporate and imperial power structures. In this vein, activists recently delivered a letter to the PMO signed by [68 groups](#), representing one million Canadians, demanding an end to arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Similarly, dozens of groups sent a [letter](#) to Trudeau last week calling on Canada to support a WTO waiver for COVID vaccines.

Beyond specific campaigns, we need social movements and political parties to challenge the arms economy and upward flow of wealth spurred by intellectual property rights accords and other forms of exploitation. In brief we need masses of Canadians questioning an unjust status quo.

We need to build a peaceful, fair world where aid is given because we are all our sisters' keepers.

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