

Israeli Gaza Blockade Announcement Silent on Issue of Gazan Exports

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

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Montreal – On late Sunday, June 20, Israeli spokesman Mark Regev announced “...a green light of approval for all goods to enter Gaza except for military items and materials that can strengthen Hamas’s military machine.” The announcement came after days of evidently heated debate by Israel’s security cabinet, reeling from international criticism of the blockade following Israel’s lethal flotilla raid. Reaction to the announcement has been guarded. UN envoy Tony Blair said the real test will be “not what is said, but what is done.” White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said the Obama administration wants to explore expanding freedom of movement and commerce between the West Bank and Gaza. The UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA), which looks after Palestinian refugees, urged that the blockade be ended, as have Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas, which governs in Gaza.

It is unclear if the announced changes will be fully implemented. However, according to Al Jazeera news network, on the morning of June 22, over 100 truckloads of goods entered Gaza through the Kerem Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) crossing at the south-east corner of the Gaza Strip. Nevertheless, Israel vows to continue its severe restrictions on the entry of items it says could be used to build weapons, including cement and steel rods. These and other construction materials are urgently needed to reconstruct Gaza’s infrastructure and rebuild the homes of the estimated 100,000 Gazans left homeless by last year’s 22-day attack.

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) welcomes Israel’s announcement, but backs UNRWA’s call for a complete end to the blockade. “The blockade violates the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibiting collective punishment of civilians, has caused deep suffering and achieved none of its announced objectives,” says CJPME President Thomas Woodley. “Israel and the international community have many alternatives, such as international inspections, to safeguard Israel’s security without causing intense hardship among Gaza’s civilian population,” he adds.

The announcement was silent on whether the prohibition on Gaza exports and the restrictions on fishing rights and freedom of movement and commerce between Gaza and the West Bank would be modified. As UNRWA spokesman Christopher Gunness points out, simply allowing more goods in, without lifting the prohibition on exporting, will intensify Gaza’s dependence on foreign aid. Gazan fishermen are currently prohibited by Israel from fishing beyond 5 km off the coast, in the deeper waters where fish are more abundant; those venturing beyond the limit are fired upon by the Israeli navy. Gazan business owners want expanded commerce with the West Bank. Israel continues to prevent Israeli and

foreign journalists from entering Gaza, and its restrictions on movement into and out of the Strip complicate family visits.

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Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is a non-profit and secular organization bringing together men and women of all backgrounds who labour to see justice and peace take root again in the Middle East. Its mission is to empower decision-makers to view all sides with fairness and to promote the equitable and sustainable development of the region.

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