



Robert Oliphant

M.P. for Don Valley West
Député de Don Valley-Ouest



May 25, 2021

Islamic Society of Toronto
4 Thorncliffe Park Drive
Toronto, ON M4H 1H1

Dear friends at the Islamic Society of Toronto:

Thank you for writing to me about the very concerning situation in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel. I have been following the situation very closely in my various roles: Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Member of Parliament for Don Valley West, and as a United Church Minister. I am also following very personally as someone who has visited both Israel and Palestine 6 times over the last 40 years.

First, as a Canadian, an ordained United Church Minister, and simply as a human being, I am appalled by the violence in and around the Al-Aqsa mosque, a place of worship and one of the holiest sites for Muslims. This violence was especially concerning as Muslims gathered for prayers during Ramadan and right before Eid ul Fitr. I recognize not only the significance of this holy time, but firmly believe in the need to ensure the sanctity and safety of places of worship. All forms of discrimination, and in this case, discrimination on the basis of freedom of religion or belief, are reprehensible for individuals and all societies. Our Canadian voices must be united in this regard as a people formed and informed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. While it is applicable only in Canada, its principles are universal and should guide us as we act in the world.

In addition to the violence at Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, the continued expansion of settlements, the demolitions and evictions, and the ongoing cases in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan are very concerning. These actions impact families and livelihoods and do not serve peace or obey international law. The Canadian Liberal government has steadfastly publicly opposed settlements in occupied territory and will continue to do so. As we have said repeatedly, they also further jeopardize the prospects for a two-state solution.

...2/

House of Commons
The Valour Building, Room 1200
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
Tel: 613-992-2855
Fax: 613-995-1635

Constituency
1670 Bayview Ave., Suite 310
Toronto, Ontario M4G 3C2
Tel: 416-467-7275
Fax: 416-467-8550

Chambre des Communes
Édifice de la Bravoure, Pièce 1200
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
Tel: 613-992-2855
Fax: 613-995-1635

Circonscription
1670 Ave Bayview, Pièce 310
Toronto, Ontario M4G 3C2
Tel: 416-467-7275
Fax: 416-467-8550

Rob.Oliphant@parl.gc.ca
www.roboliphantmp.ca

I have been profoundly concerned about the airstrikes into Gaza, violence against journalists, and attacks on humanitarian workers and facilities. The significant loss of life – particularly women and children – is unacceptable. International law must be respected in protecting civilians, media freedom, and in granting safe humanitarian access into Gaza. Equally, the rocket attacks fired by Hamas into populated areas of Israel are also unacceptable. They put the safety of civilians at great risk and cause harm to both Israeli and Palestinian people. Canada supports the right of Israelis to live in peace within secure boundaries and recognizes its right to assure its own security. With respect to both of these concerns, our Prime Minister called for a mutual ceasefire and, while it is fragile, we are encouraged that one continues to hold. As a country, we both support and are thankful for the role that Egypt has played in moving both parties towards a ceasefire.

In addition to being the Member of Parliament for the very diverse riding of Don Valley West, I am the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In this role, I have been engaged on Canada's response to this evolving situation, along with Minister Garneau and Prime Minister Trudeau, to bring an end to this unacceptable series of events. I have met with both Jewish and Muslim community groups across the country and have heard their concerns. Additionally, I have spoken with foreign diplomats expressing Canada's concerns and those of Canadians about this conflict in an attempt to find a way for Canada to be both constructive and compassionate. We are committed to doing our part in supporting the ceasefire as well as in providing humanitarian and development aid to help rebuild Gaza. This will be in line with our long-held support for the work of UNWRA, which the Liberal government reinstated after the Conservative government withdrew funding.

As I said above, Canada welcomes the news of a ceasefire in Gaza and Israel and is committed to the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, including the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel. We will continue to do this work in concert with our allies and directly in communication with the concerned parties in the region.

This latest conflict has shown the deep roots of a long-standing conflict that limits the aspirations of the Palestinian people to have a state that they can call their own, to have their human rights respected and to have hope that their children will have lives that are both peaceful and prosperous. It has also shown that Israel's security and even existence is fragile and that the only thing which will ensure its future is a negotiated settlement that is fair and just.

To that end, Canada and Canadians must work for peace with justice for both Palestinians and Israelis.

I thank you again for writing.

Yours truly,



Robert Oliphant, M.P.
Don Valley West