



Federation of  
**Post-Secondary Educators**  
of BC

April 30, 2024

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

The Honourable Mélanie Joly  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

The Honourable Robert Rae  
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York  
Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations in New York  
466 Lexington Avenue, 20th Floor  
New York, NY 10017  
United States of America

Via email to [pm@pm.gc.ca](mailto:pm@pm.gc.ca), [melanie.joly@parl.gc.ca](mailto:melanie.joly@parl.gc.ca), and [canada.un@international.gc.ca](mailto:canada.un@international.gc.ca)

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, Minister Joly, and Ambassador Rae,

Considering the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in the Middle East and Gaza and the urgent need for emergency civilian assistance to prevent further deaths, including as a result of famine, we commend your recent decision to restore funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). However, it is with deep concern that we call for your government to act on the responsibility to protect; to restore Canada's historical role in this regard as a neutral peacekeeper and humanitarian first responder ensuring better protection of civilians in harm's way, particularly women and children; and to strengthen your support of humanitarian responses in Gaza.

The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC (FPSE) represents the voices of over 10,000 higher education faculty and staff in colleges and universities across BC. We wish to remind your government and opposition leaders that UNRWA—which currently employs over 30,000 people (primarily refugee workers and international staff), including 13,000 in Gaza—has provided essential, direct relief to Palestinian refugees since it was founded through a United Nations resolution in 1949.

Notably, a key part of the work of UNRWA focuses on the provision of basic education (706 schools; 19,877 staff; and 543,075 students, including 294,086 Gazans), higher education (8 vocational training centres and 2 teacher training institutes), and human rights education. We ask, to those questioning the mandate or the historical importance of UNRWA, that if this credible organization were not providing basic and advanced education in the region, then who would or could fill this vacuum, particularly either during or in the aftermath of conflict situations?

We also wish to underscore that UNRWA provides important assistance (education, health care, housing, financial aid) to displaced Palestinian refugees living in semi-permanent camps in the West Bank, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon and critical humanitarian assistance to displaced, injured, and traumatized civilians in Gaza. As the civilian death toll continues to climb, many of our members are concerned about the fate of future generations in this war-torn region.

Finally, we wish to remind you that support for UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations needs to be maintained given the current magnitude of civilian deaths and the displacement, injury, and traumatization of Gazan residents. UNRWA, under the auspices of the international community (i.e., the United Nations), must continue to play its important and necessary role in immediate relief efforts; support for future reconstruction for displaced Palestinians inside Gaza; and ongoing health, social, and educational support for Palestinian refugees located in the wider region. Canada, as a longstanding UN member state and party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Refugee Convention, Geneva Conventions, and Genocide Convention, must therefore advance the responsibility to protect by pressuring the warring parties to immediately restore safe humanitarian access to Gaza.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brent Calvert", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brent Calvert  
President

cc: The Honourable Pierre Poilievre, Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada  
Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois  
Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party  
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada