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The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Freeland,

We write with deep concern about the continued deterioration of the human rights and humanitarian situation of Palestinians. We believe more is needed from the Government of Canada.

While Canada will keep working to encourage all parties to take necessary diplomatic efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace for Palestinians and Israelis, neither Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Abbas, nor their respective governments currently appear interested to advance a political vision grounded in respect for international law or universal human rights principles such as justice and respect for human dignity.

We reaffirm the Government of Canada is obligated to ensure both Israeli and Palestinian actors respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law norms, and accordingly we condemn all direct or indiscriminate attacks against civilians.

However, one reality must not be ignored: nearly 46 percent of the 4.9 million Palestinians living in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip are children under the age of 18. This generation of Palestinian children have lived subject to constant Israeli military scrutiny and intervention. With leaders that lack a political vision to pave the way for a future with justice and equality, they see only a future with limited prospects where their hopes and dreams are stifled.

Palestinian children in the West Bank, like adults, face arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment under an Israeli military detention system that denies them basic rights.

Military law has applied to Palestinians in the West Bank since 1967. Israeli settlers, however, who reside within the bounds of the West Bank, in violation of international law, are subject to the Israeli civilian legal framework. Accordingly, Israel operates two separate and unequal legal systems in the same territory.

Israel has the dubious distinction of being the only country in the world that automatically and systematically prosecutes children in military courts that lack fundamental fair trial rights and protections. Israel prosecutes an estimated 500 to 700 Palestinian children in military courts each year.

Child detainees typically arrive to interrogation bound, blindfolded, frightened, and sleep deprived; and often give confessions after verbal abuse, threats, physical and psychological violence. Israeli military law provides no right to legal counsel during interrogation.

Three out of four Palestinian children experience some form of physical violence following arrest, according to evidence collected by Defense for Children International - Palestine.

Ill-treatment of Palestinian children arrested by Israeli forces in the West Bank has been widely documented. In 2013, UNICEF released a report titled *Children in Israeli military detention: Observations and recommendations*. The report concluded that “ill-treatment of children who come in contact with the military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized throughout the process, from the moment of arrest until the child’s prosecution and eventual conviction and sentencing.”

International juvenile justice standards, which Israel has obliged itself to implement by ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, demand that children should only be deprived of their liberty as a measure of last resort, must not be unlawfully or arbitrarily detained, and must not be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Canada’s foreign policy indicates a priority commitment to protection of the rights of children around the world, particularly children living in conflict-affected areas. Palestinian children have the right to a safe and just future.

As a minimum safeguard while Palestinian children continue to be detained and prosecuted within the Israeli military court system, Israeli authorities must respect and ensure basic due process rights and the absolute prohibition against torture and ill-treatment, and from the moment of arrest, operations and procedures must be carried out in accordance with international juvenile justice standards, specifically the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We call on the Government of Canada to work with international partners to: (1) appoint a Special Envoy to promote, monitor and report on human rights situation of Palestinian children living in the Palestinian Territory, specifically undertaking an evaluative analysis of Israeli military law and practice as they affect Palestinian children in the West Bank by reference to the standards of international law and

international children's rights or conduct the evaluative analysis through the Representative Office of Canada to the Palestinian Authority, the Embassy of Canada to Israel, and other relevant Global Affairs Canada staff focusing on the situation of children and armed conflict; (2) take concrete steps to promote greater respect for human rights and increase protections for Palestinian children; and (3) hold Israeli military authorities accountable to their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

We will keep working to encourage all parties to take necessary diplomatic efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace for Palestinians and Israelis, but we also understand that in parallel it is necessary and our obligation to demand human rights, justice and equality for Palestinian children. Failure to do so simply perpetuates 50 years of injustice that has no end in sight. We need your bold leadership to help build a just and secure future for all children.

Sincerely,