

## YK Citizens for Ceasefire City Council Presentation

I would like to start off with a thank you to Mayor Alty, to the city councilors, and city staff who are here today or are elsewhere. Thank you for all your hard work keeping our city working and safe with a special recognition for your leadership and role during our most recent evacuation. Your work is important and we appreciate all the work you do—visible or behind the scenes. Mahsi.

I am Derek Lindman and I am spokesperson for the YK Citizens for Ceasefire a grassroots organization that formed in response to the attacks on Gaza which has turned it into, according to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, “a graveyard for children.”<sup>1</sup>

We are a group of over 162 members from diverse backgrounds who call Yellowknife home. We have the organizing principles of respect for the identities of our members, a commitment to peaceful actions, and a specific stance against anti-semitism and Islamophobia. We have held meetings and regular rallies with around 50-80 people in attendance and before our first week as an organization was done we organized a march and rally with over 250-300 people in downtown Yellowknife.<sup>2</sup> We are united around the principle that the killings of civilians must stop and we are united in our position that there must be: (1) an immediate ceasefire; (2) restoration of services to the region—including electricity, water, and internet to; and, (3) free passage of humanitarian aid where it is needed in Gaza. We are here today inviting you, Yellowknife City Council and the mayor to join the City Council of Burnaby, B.C., the mayors of Edmonton and Toronto as well as locally, the Union of Northern Workers<sup>3</sup> and PSAC<sup>4</sup> in calling for a ceasefire, among other aspects, for reasons that I will discuss below.

As of November 28th, we know, according to the Geneva-based Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 20 341 people have been killed in Gaza which includes 8 176 children.<sup>5</sup> That means over 40% of the people killed in Gaza are children. We know that there have been 210 deaths to hospital staff as 22 hospitals, 55 clinics, and 46 ambulances have been targeted. We know that 1.7 million people have been internally displaced in Gaza which is over 70% of the population and that over 59 000 housing units have been destroyed and over 165 000 units have been

<sup>1</sup> Gaza: UN experts call on international community to prevent genocide ... (n.d.). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/gaza-un-experts-call-international-community-prevent-genocide-against>

<sup>2</sup> Emily Blake-November 4, 2023. (2023, November 5). *Yellowknifers March for ceasefire in Gaza*. Cabin Radio. <https://cabinradio.ca/159943/news/yellowknife/yellowknifers-march-for-ceasefire-in-gaza/>

<sup>3</sup> *Canadian labour joins the call for urgent ceasefire in Gaza*. Canadian Labour joins the call for urgent ceasefire in Gaza | Union of Northern Workers. (2023, November 9). <https://unw.ca/news-updates/canadian-labour-joins-call-urgent-ceasefire-gaza>

<sup>4</sup> *Canadian labour joins the call for urgent ceasefire in Gaza*. Canadian Labour joins the call for urgent ceasefire in Gaza | Union of Northern Workers. (2023, November 9). <https://unw.ca/news-updates/canadian-labour-joins-call-urgent-ceasefire-gaza>

<sup>5</sup> Monitor, E.-M. H. R. (n.d.). *Statistics on the Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip (07 October - 24 November 2023)*. Euro. <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5981/Statistics-on-the-Israeli-Genocide-in-the-Gaza-Strip-%2807-October---24-November-2023%29>

partially destroyed or damaged.<sup>6</sup> We know that according to UN experts with the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights that there is “no safe zone anywhere in Gaza.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, 108 UN Relief and Works Agency workers have died and that there have been at least 218 internally Displaced Gazans killed at UNWRA shelters.<sup>8</sup>

While Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said the killings of civilians must stop,<sup>9</sup> he has failed to call for a cease fire and join countries like France<sup>10</sup>, Spain, and Belgium<sup>11</sup> in calling for one. Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) asserts that Canada has failed its obligation to uphold International Humanitarian Law as Israel indiscriminately kills civilians, destroys essential infrastructure, withholds essential items including water and medicine.<sup>12</sup> While Trudeau says that the killing of children must stop, Canada still provides military aid and weapons sales to Israel. This leads to the grim and brutal reality that as Canadians we wake up with the knowledge that not only is our government not calling for a ceasefire and failing in its international duty to uphold International Humanitarian Law, we are also providing weapons to a country that is, according to the sources quoted above, “indiscriminately killing children.”

By failing to call for a permanent ceasefire, Canada is continuing to allow the humanitarian disaster to unfold. While I could discuss the effects of Israel’s siege that at times completely and at other times has drastically reduced flow of aid and discuss the siege of Gaza that already existed before the invasion, instead I will tell an illustrative story: There were 39 premature babies at Gaza’s largest hospital and 8 of those babies died after their incubators could no longer be powered as hospital ran out of fuel to power their generators<sup>13</sup>—fuel and electricity was

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<sup>6</sup>Monitor, E.-M. H. R. (n.d.-a). *Statistics on the Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip (07 October - 24 November 2023)*. Euro. <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5981/Statistics-on-the-Israeli-Genocide-in-the-Gaza-Strip-%2807-October---24-November-2023%29>

<sup>7</sup> Un expert warns of new instance of mass ethnic cleansing of ... (n.d.-b). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/un-expert-warns-new-instance-mass-ethnic-cleansing-palestinians-calls>

<sup>8</sup> UNRWA situation report #39 on the situation in the Gaza Strip and the ... (n.d.-c). <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-39-situation-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem>

<sup>9</sup> Thomson Reuters. (2023, November 14). *Canadian PM Trudeau tells Israel killing of babies in Gaza must end*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/canadian-pm-trudeau-tells-israel-killing-babies-gaza-must-end-2023-11-14/>

<sup>10</sup> XENOS, A., PICARD, F., MELLAZ, I., & GNIGNATI, R. (2023, November 14). *The debate - macron's call for ceasefire to Israel-hamas war divides allies*. France 24. <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/the-debate/20231113-how-to-get-to-a-ceasefire-macron-s-call-divides-israel-s-allies>

<sup>11</sup> Thomson Reuters. (2023b, November 24). *Spain denounces “indiscriminate” Gaza deaths, angering Israel*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spains-pm-sanchez-current-ceasefire-gaza-not-enough-we-need-permanent-ceasefire-2023-11-24/>

<sup>12</sup> Domaradzki-Kim, S. (2023, November 23). *Canada must call for immediate ceasefire in Gaza*. Doctors Without Borders / Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF ... <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.ca/canada-must-call-immediate-ceasefire-gaza/>

<sup>13</sup> Jamal, U. (2023, November 20). *Why does Israel target Palestinian hospitals? psyops, say analysts*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/11/20/why-does-israel-target-palestinian-hospitals-psyops-say-analysts>

denied to them by Israel in their siege. The surviving babies have since, thankfully, been transported safely to Egypt with a risk still to their lives. It should be noted that, due to Israel's siege and restriction of water they had to be fed with formula mixed with contaminated water before they arrived in Egypt.<sup>14</sup>

Someone respected by me and someone who knows the city intimately well, said that passing a resolution like this is outside the scope of the city and beyond the city's mandate. While I respect the complexity of city politics and the delicate balance that must be played, I, due to the reasons above, think that these are exceptional times and require exceptional acts. The city council of Burnaby agrees with me and we as people who make up the group YK Citizens for Ceasefire also agree and feel this move would demonstrate Yellowknife commitments to human rights when expressing this commitment isn't easy, but hard. We know when supporting human rights during difficult times is the most meaningful time to enact our values.

Before I end, I want to make three more points: First, Indigenous members of our group want me, and I agree with them, to make the point that Israel is a colonizer state. As we advocate for an immediate ceasefire, the restoration of vital services, and unrestricted humanitarian access, we recognize the parallels between this situation and the historical experiences of the First Nations peoples', of colonization and genocide in Canada, underscoring the connection of current world events to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation movement. Supporting this resolution can be seen, in part, as a continuation of Yellowknife's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

The second point, is that, again, while Gaza may feel far away, we as a community group shudder in horror realizing that MSF has had to coin a new acronym while providing healthcare in Gaza: WCNSF which means: wounded child, no surviving family.<sup>15</sup> We have to realize that entire families have been killed<sup>16</sup> in single missile attack from Israel and this means for the community members who have family or friends in Gaza that they don't know if the last message, the last phone call—filled with hard to hear voices and lost signal—is the last one. The last one with everyone. Everyone in their family.

The last point I want to make is that I work as an educational assistant in a school in Yellowknife. I have taught or supported some of the kids of people in this room. I hope I have done a good job and please know that I care and try to do my best everyday and I work hard to be better. There are about 250 children at my school and when I think about the number of dead children in Gaza, I did the math and I realized that Israel has killed 32 and around a half of my schools in the approximately 50 days of fighting. Israel has killed more children in 50 days of fighting than Russia has of Ukrainian children in 2 years of their invasion. Indeed, according to

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> *Why the US must support an immediate ceasefire in Gaza*. Doctors Without Borders - USA. (n.d.). <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/why-us-must-support-immediate-ceasefire-gaza>

<sup>16</sup> *Israeli attacks wipe out entire families in Gaza*. Amnesty International. (2023, November 8). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-as-israeli-attacks-wipe-out-entire-families-in-gaza/>

the statistics<sup>17</sup> from the UN, Israel has killed in 50 days versus 2 years 14 and ½ times more children.

City council and mayor: This needs to stop. This needs to stop. This needs to stop. And I respectfully and humbly ask that in these difficult times that the council and the mayor do the difficult act, but the important act to support human rights and to use the power you have to be part of the solution. Mahsi.

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<sup>17</sup> United Nations. (n.d.). *Civilian deaths in Ukraine War top 10,000, Un says in Ukraine*. United Nations. <https://ukraine.un.org/en/253322-civilian-deaths-ukraine-war-top-10000-un-says>

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## **Speaking Notes:**

### **Resolution Wording**

THAT the Mayor write a letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly to request that the Federal Government call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza; the restoration of basic services including food, water, power, fuel, communications, and

medical services to the population of Gaza; unhindered access for humanitarian aid; and the release of all hostages;

THAT the Mayor and Council of the City of Yellowknife condemn all acts of anti-semitism, anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia in our community, and will work to ensure our community is just, safe and welcoming for all; and

THAT MP McLeod, and upcoming Northwest Territories premier, receive a copy of the letter.

We are asking the Yellowknife City Council to pass a resolution similar to the one passed by the City of Burnaby. This will signify municipal support for a ceasefire and represent the collective voice of constituents to the Territorial and federal governments. It's worth noting that both the Mayor of Toronto and, more recently, the Mayor of Edmonton, have released public statements calling for the Government of Canada to endorse a ceasefire, echoing the sentiments of their communities. "When my grandparents spoke of this time as survivors of concentration camps, they always said, 'Never again. Never again can we allow this to happen to anyone.'"