

## Response by Peter Larson to CBC reply to OFIP Open Letter

Dear Mr. Hambleton,

Thank you for your prompt response to our email letter raising concerns about CBC coverage of the Israel/Palestine issue. We appreciate that you are re-examining your reporting on the subject. I noted the remarkable interview today on the Current which had a "balanced" segment including an Israeli and a Palestinian Canadian. Good for you.

But we find it difficult to accept your suggestion that reporting on Covid-19 has "crowded out" stories such as the Human Right Watch report, which was extensively covered by the BBC and other public broadcasters. I note in passing that CBC did find time/space to cover the tragedy at a religious event in northern Israel a week earlier.

When an organization as respected as HRW documents in great detail "the systematic oppression and discrimination" by Israeli authorities against Palestinians, it was an important story which was extensively covered by the BBC and other public broadcasters.

You state in your letter that "the CBC has a long and very credible record" of covering the issues of Israel/Palestine. It is the opinion of Mr. Halton and many others that was true in the past but not in recent years. He makes the point that, even before the closing of your Jerusalem bureau, there was a notable lack of reporting on the discrimination faced by Palestinians and the dispossession of their land by expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

We understand the pressures facing CBC. We all know that stories critical of Israeli policies bring down a heavy-handed protest by pro-Israel organizations in Canada who are quick to level the damaging accusation of "anti-semitism". The easy choice is simply to avoid such stories.

Curiously, you also state in your letter that "whatever history CBC News has with this story doesn't really matter right now" because of the urgency of the current situation.

On the contrary, we would argue that "history" is essential for providing depth and context to reporting on what is happening now. The BBC's senior Middle East correspondent, Jeremy Bowen, has been underlining repeatedly that the conflict

was "triggered" by heavy-handed Israeli policing around the al-Aksa mosque, and the efforts to evict Palestinians from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem. In a recent broadcast, he adds that the current conflict *"comes after years of successive Israeli governments pursuing the strategic objective of making Jerusalem more Jewish. Big settlements for Jews were built on occupied land to ring the city, breaking international law."*

We applaud the fact that you are sending in a team of your correspondents to cover the conflict and hope they will provide the kind of context provided by Bowen and others. May we also suggest that when the immediate violence has subsided that you have your fine correspondent Margaret Evans do a mini-doc or a series on a subject the CBC has never comprehensively tackled --- the often brutal reality Palestinians face under the Occupation in the West Bank.

We make these comments in the hope that our public broadcaster display the same independence and courage in reporting on this subject as it does on other contentious issues.

One final point I would like to make clear. The organization of which I am chair (Ottawa Forum on Israel/Palestine) is not a part of the "Palestinian community". We are not even a "pro-Palestinian" organization. It is a Canadian organization concerned with human rights for all in the Middle East. Please take a moment to look at our website at [www.ottawforumip.org](http://www.ottawforumip.org) and our leadership and our council of advisors which include many more former Canadian ambassadors and Christian clerics than Palestinians.

Very sincerely,

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