

Open Letter: Civil society coalition urges Canada to stop all arms transfers to Israel

September 3, 2024

Dear Minister Joly,

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, are deeply concerned at the enduring devastation in Gaza. Canada risks complicity in this humanitarian catastrophe through its ongoing transfer of military goods destined to Israel, exports which are incompatible with its obligations under the [Arms Trade Treaty](#) (ATT). As organizations committed to upholding human rights, the protection of civilians, peace, and justice—several of whom are present in Gaza and seeing daily the grave consequences of the transfer of weapons to conflict parties—we urge the Government of Canada to take immediate action to cease all exports of arms and arms components to Israel, as well as any and all transfers for which Israel will be the end user.

In the past ten months, more than [40,000 Palestinians](#) have been killed in Israel's military campaign across the Gaza Strip, the majority being women and children. More than 92,000 have been injured and critical civilian infrastructure has been destroyed. Over the last few weeks only, Israel attacked at least seven schools. They add to the long list of schools, hospitals, refugee camps and places of worship hit since October—many of these crowded with displaced civilians sheltering from the violence.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the ATT, which Canada acceded to five years ago. Under the ATT, Canada is prohibited from exporting arms if those transfers would be used to commit serious crimes under international law including disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks. Moreover, states parties to the Treaty cannot authorize arms transfers if there is an overriding risk they could be misused, including to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL)—the very type of behaviour that has become routine by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). These obligations are also reflected under domestic law in [Canada's Export and Import Permits Act](#) (EIPA).

In addition, the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) [order to halt Israel's military offensive in Rafah](#) due to the plausible [risk of genocide](#) as well as its July 19th [Advisory Opinion](#) which found that Israel's prolonged occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful are significant international legal findings that call for concrete policy changes, and not just on the part of Israel. Canada needs to urgently review its own cooperation practices to ensure they prevent international crimes and do not contribute towards any further violations of international law.

To be sure, earlier this year it was reported that your government had paused the further authorization of arms transfers to Israel, which was a definitive step in the right direction. However, since then, the extent of this policy has not been officially outlined, proposed permits for arms transfers to Israel have not been denied but rather [left in limbo](#) for future authorization, and, most disturbingly, previously approved arms transfers have [continued unabated](#).

We are extremely concerned that these previously authorized transfers include at least [\\$95 million in Canadian military goods](#) that could be exported to Israel by the end of 2025, despite the ongoing and [well-documented pattern of IHL and human rights violations](#) by Israel in Gaza and the West Bank. The continuous arming of Israel by Canada contradicts our country's commitment to upholding IHL and human rights. It also undermines efforts to end hostilities in Gaza through the implementation of a [ceasefire, which Canada has pledged to support](#).

On August 14th, the United States government [announced that a Quebec-based company](#), General Dynamics Ordnance and Tactical Systems Inc., will be the principal contractor in the likely sale of \$61-million US in high explosive mortar cartridges and related equipment to Israel. This announcement directly contradicts the claims made by the Canadian government that the only outstanding military exports to Israel are for “non-lethal” military equipment. In addition, all of Canada’s arms exports are subject to ATT obligations, even those transferred under a General Export Permit to the United States.

Canada cannot credibly prioritize diplomatic solutions and support for peace while simultaneously contributing to the arming of a conflict in which violations of IHL are persistent and well-documented. By halting all military exports that could be used in the hostilities—including those via the United States—Canada will not only comply with its international and domestic legal obligations, but also take a principled stance in advancing the rule of law, human rights and compliance with IHL, thereby reinforcing its international reputation as a defender of these values.

We urge your office to refuse the transfer of the recently announced mortar cartridge sale with the United States and to cease all military exports to Israel—both direct and those transferred through the United States—including by revoking all extant permits. We remain committed to working with the Government of Canada to meet its legal obligations, uphold our shared values and to promote peace and justice both at home and abroad. We trust that you will give this matter the urgent attention it requires and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

[Amnistie internationale Canada francophone](#)
[Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East \(CJPME\)](#)
[CARE Canada](#)
[Cooperation Canada](#)
[Development and Peace – Caritas Canada](#)
[Doctors of the World Canada](#)
[Human Concern International](#)
[Humanity & Inclusion Canada](#)
[Independent Jewish Voices Canada](#)
[The International Development and Relief Foundation \(IDRF\)](#)
[Islamic Relief Canada](#)
[Labour Against the Arms Trade](#)
[Mennonite Central Committee Canada](#)
[Oxfam Canada](#)
[Oxfam-Québec](#)
[Project Ploughshares](#)
[The Rideau Institute \(including Ceasefire.ca\)](#)
[Save the Children Canada](#)
[World BEYOND War](#)