

Meet Your MP: It's Not as Tough as You Think!



-Participant Workbook-

The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada
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Acknowledgments

The United Church of Canada in partnership with the United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine/Israel hosted *Creating Brave Spaces for Hard Conversations: Deepening Learning for More Intentional Action* in November of 2018. Volunteers from across the country engaged in learning new skills for sharing information and designed the workshops you have your hands. Jeanette Romkema of Global Learning Partners ably facilitated the event and supported the process from draft workshops to final design, and we are grateful to her.

We give thanks for the many volunteers committed to ending the occupation in Palestine and particularly for promoting the “No Way to Treat a Child” Campaign of Defence for Children International - Palestine. The following people gave a week of their time for travel and education and then further work on refining their workshops. Thanks to: Dawn Waring, Dean Reidt, Debbie Hubbard, Donna Wilson, Doug Rigby, George Bartlett, Jan McIntyre, Jeff Winkelaar, Jim Wicks, Linda Scherzinger, Lori Minler, Mervyn Russell, Myrna Wicks, Nel Ouwens, Norman Williams, Pat Mercer, and Ranya El-Sharkawi. The workshops are:

1. *From Awareness to Action: Building a Network to Advocate for the Rights of Palestinian Children (4 Hours)*
2. *Seeking Justice: An Introduction to the Reality of Palestinian Children in Israeli Military Detention (90 Minutes)*
3. *Stand by Me: The UN Convention on the Rights of a Child and Palestinian Children’s Experiences with the Israeli Military (3 Hours)*
4. *Writing for Action: Letter Writing to Members of Parliament (2 Hours)*
5. *Meet Your MP: It’s Not as Tough as You Think! (2.5 Hours)*
6. *An Introduction to Self-Care for Justice-Seekers (2 Hours)*

All Brave Spaces resources are available for download on the United Church website (www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/brave-spaces-talking-about-palestinian-childrens-rights). Note that the Brave Spaces resources were originally conceived of as in-person experiences for small groups; a tip sheet for adapting Brave Spaces for online delivery is also available at this url.

NOTE: This resource was written with the intention of acknowledging a variety of life experiences and cultural differences. However, it is acknowledged that this is done within dominant norms and frameworks that may inherently exclude some people’s life experiences and culture.



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3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 200
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4 CANADA

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Endorsement

“The United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine/Israel (UNJPPI) is an informal network of United Church of Canada people. We work for a just peace in Palestine and Israel by calling for an end to the illegal Israeli military occupation and equal right for all who live in Israel and Palestine. We do this through education and advocacy.

UNJPPI was pleased to support the Brave Spaces for Hard Conversations event and are now pleased to endorse and help share the workshops that were developed at the event. We expect that they will be an invaluable asset for people doing education and advocacy work in support of Palestinian children and their families.”

- The United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine/Israel (UNJPPI)



Welcome!

Acknowledgement of the Land

We gratefully acknowledge that we gather on the territory of _____. We acknowledge their stewardship of this land throughout the ages and we seek to live with respect on this land, and live in peace and friendship with its people.

More information from United Church of Canada can be found here:

www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/acknowledging-the-territory.pdf

Who Are We and Why Are We Here?

Overview

Let's have a look at our plan for this workshop.

- Welcome!
- Acknowledgement of the Land
- Who Are We and Why Are We Here?
- Overview
- Why is it Important to Meet with Our MP?
- Who Should Visit Their MP?
- A Visit with an MP
- Let's Try It Out!
- Planning My Next Steps
- Taking the First Step

- Which part excites you most?

Photo (L to R): S. Michael Lynk (UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory), Senator Peter Harder, Patti Talbot (The United Church of Canada), Brad Parker (Defense of Children International - Palestine), Christie Neufeldt (The United Church of Canada), and Jennifer Wiebe (Mennonite Central Committee). (Credit: The United Church of Canada)



Why Is It Important to Meet with Our MPs?

On your own, **jot down** some notes about WHY it can be helpful and important to meet with your MP.

Then, **write** down why YOU (and others) might hesitate to do so.

Consider:

- How can you get past these barriers?
- What may help you achieve your goal of meeting your MP?
- Who may you need to invite in? For what purpose?

In pairs, take 10 minutes to **share** your thoughts.

We'll hear a sample.



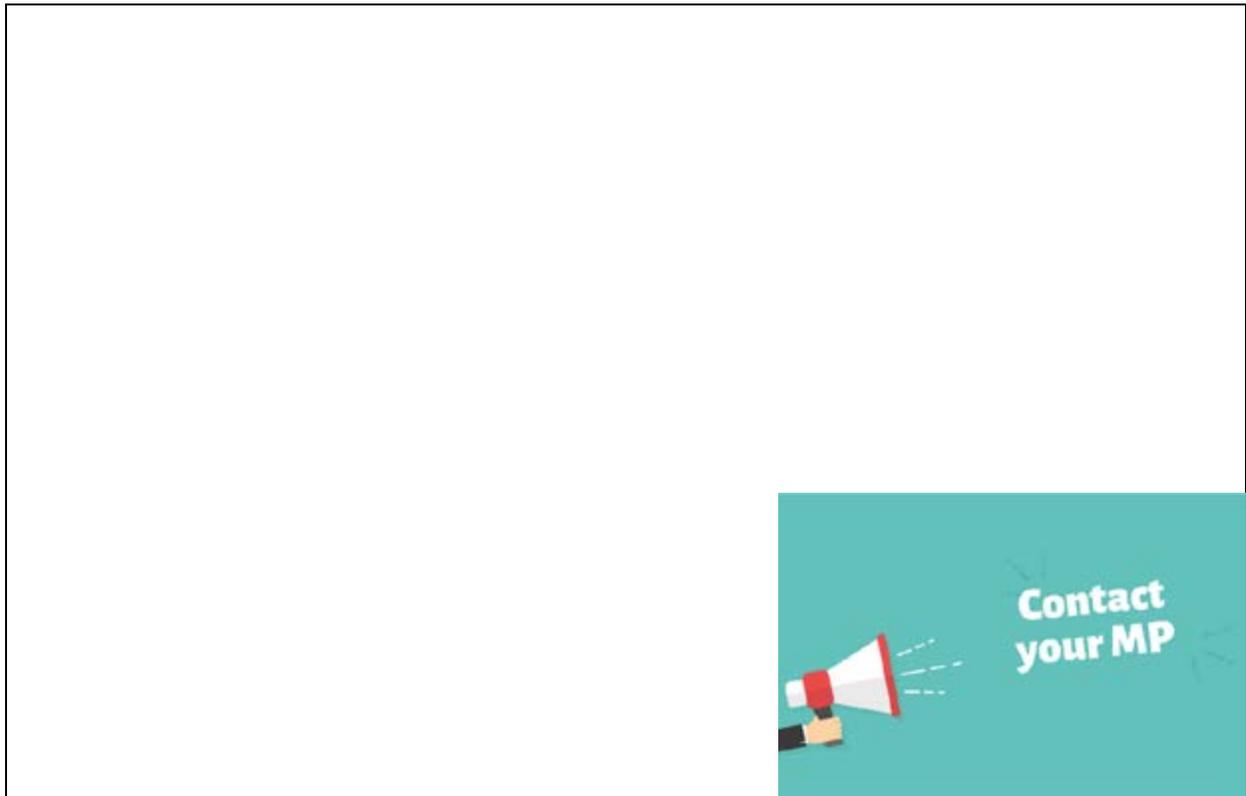
Who Should Visit Their MP?

Let me share a story about a visit to an MP As you listen, **consider** these questions:

- *What surprises you or resonates with what you thought?*
- *What seemed important in this story about how to visit an MP?*

In groups of 3-4, **discuss** these questions and **record** your thoughts below:

- What do you know about your MP?
- What else do you need to know?
- What is your MP's knowledge, attitude and position on Israel/Palestine?
- What do you want to ask your MP to do (or stop doing)?



The image shows a large, empty rectangular box intended for participants to record their thoughts. In the bottom right corner of this box, there is a teal-colored graphic. It features a white megaphone with a red top and a yellow handle, emitting white sound waves. To the right of the megaphone, the text "Contact your MP" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font.

Let's hear what you know and want to know.

A Visit with an MP

A. Follow along with the next page about how to schedule a meeting. As we read, **consider** these questions:

- What seems especially helpful for you and your visit?
- What seems quite challenging?
- What would you add?

Scheduling a Meeting¹

Such a meeting can take place in the MP's Ottawa office or in the MP's riding office. If you know your MP is going to be home for a Parliamentary recess, take advantage of this time by planning a meeting in the riding. It is usually much easier to schedule a personal appointment with an MP (even one who is a Cabinet Minister) in her or his constituency office than in their Ottawa office. Virtually all MPs have regular constituency office appointment hours.

Contact your MP's Appointment Secretary, state your affiliations and the subject you wish to discuss, and ask for 15 to 20 minutes of your MP's time. If it is clear that the MP is unable to meet with you, then a very good substitute is a meeting with the assistant in charge of the issue area you are interested in discussing. **DO NOT FEEL DISCOURAGED IF YOU CANNOT MEET WITH YOUR MP.** In fact, public officials have demanding schedules and depend on their assistants to research issues and report on constituent concerns. Call to confirm your meeting a few days before it is scheduled to occur.

Build relationships – Seeking, meeting and follow up from a meeting with a Member of Parliament is part of a process of building a relationship with your member of parliament and their staff which is essential to long term advocacy.

Once the Meeting Is Scheduled

Do your homework. Learn as much as you can about the MP's record as it relates to your issue. Be prepared to talk *in detail* and directly about the issue you wish to discuss. Know the opposing arguments as well as those in favour of your view. Have your information ready in a digestible, concise form, just as you would when writing a letter or making a telephone call. Have personal stories ready - case studies that illustrate the human side of what you're talking about. Be able to answer specific questions on how the issue affects you, your community, the province or the country in general.

Contact the No Way to Treat A Child/Defence for Children International – Palestine International Advocacy Office to help you research the issue. They can help you find out about the MP's record on the issue - public statements, legislation, etc. It's much better to know if the legislator doesn't support your position *before* you go in than to find out during the meeting.

Supply fact sheets. It's important when you go that you leave something (e.g., a one-page synopsis describing the issue in bullet form) with the assistant or the MP. A Fact Sheet is included in this participant kit or check: www.nwtac.canada.dci-palestine.org.

- Let's hear your thoughts.

. On your own, **review** the tips below to help ensure a successful meeting. **Circle** what is helpful here.

During the Meeting²

Be on time. But don't be surprised if they are not. Parliamentary schedules are hectic and being a visitor to Parliament Hill often requires patience and flexibility.

Establish ties. Introduce yourself, convey information about your affiliations, and exchange pleasantries briefly. Make a point of introducing yourself to and learning the names of key staff with whom you may also meet.

Be focused. Get right to the issue you wish to discuss. Don't get bogged down in small talk or raise more than one issue. You only have a precious few minutes with the MP.

Be inquiring. Ask your MP if he or she is familiar with your issue. If the answer is negative, take the opportunity to inform him or her.

Be assertive and concrete. Know what you want in advance and ask for it. Ask your member of parliament whether they would be willing to take a concrete action no matter how small.

Be respectful. Be tolerant of differing views and keep the dialogue open. State your points clearly and firmly, but don't argue. Always be polite but don't let politeness make you timid.

Be responsive. Try to answer questions. When you can't, offer to get back to your MP with the information. It is much more important for you to provide accurate information than to give an answer which may be incorrect.

Be appreciative. Always end the meeting on a courteous note. Thank him or her for the time spent with you and leave promptly. Follow up with a thank-you letter within two weeks, capitalizing on the opportunity to restate your points.

Be political. Explain the hometown relevance of this issue. Ask others in your riding to meet with your member of parliament on the same issue.

Be discriminating. Write only on the issues that are very important to you and avoid the risk of diluting your effectiveness.

- What is especially helpful to remember here?
- What questions are coming to mind for you?

¹ Adapted from https://cpa.ca/documents/advocacy_p5.htm

² Adapted from https://cpa.ca/documents/advocacy_p5.htm

Let's Try It Out!

A. **Watch** a roleplay of meeting an MP.... As you watch, **consider** what small details in the meeting seem to make a big difference.

Let's hear some of your thoughts now.

We will now try to put these tips into action by roleplaying a visit to an MP's office. In groups of 3-4, **decide** who will take which roles in the roleplay: you will need a group of visitors, a lead visitor, and an MP.

B. **Discuss** these questions and what might work for you. Then, **plan** your role play.

- How might you help the MP to relate personally – empathetically – to the problem? To become aware of the extent of the problem? To the concern here in Canada?
- How would you convince your MP to act and help him/her to feel comfortable and confident to do so?

C. Now, **try** it out! As we watch each roleplay, **consider** these questions:

- What do you like about what they did?
- What small things did they do (or not do!) that were helpful?
- What suggestions do you have – please start with “I wonder” or “how about”?
- What questions are coming to mind for you?

D. Large group **debrief**:

- What was easier than you expected?
- What seems harder?
- What questions came to mind as you were doing it?

E. On your own, **jot down** some notes about what you want to remember to do (or not to do!) when I try this for real.

Let's hear a few thoughts.

Planning My Next Steps

On your own, **consider** all you learned, shared and discussed here today. **Name** someone you want to talk to about visiting your MP or plan your first steps in the box below. **Take** 5 minutes.

Share your plans with someone close to you, including what excites you about this and what makes you nervous.



Closing

Thank you for coming and thank you for your energy, passion and commitment to make a difference for justice, human rights and the wellbeing of Palestinian children, youth and families.

Thank you for coming and for your interest in visiting your MP.

Appendix: Sample Script

Thank the MP; introduce yourselves and the concern.

Visitor: Thank you so much for making time to meet with us. We know how full your schedule is, so we especially appreciate the chance to talk with you about a concern we have.

Let me introduce myself, our group and our concern. My name is [name] and I'm a constituent of yours, a member of [church name], and a member of the United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine/Israel (UNJPPI). [name] is also a member of UNJPPI, the [position/title], and she's recently returned from a visit to Palestine and Israel. You know [name]. He's also a constituent and a member of the local Palestine Solidarity Group.

We're here today to speak for the rights and protection of children; to share our concern about the way Palestinian children are mistreated by the state of Israel. We've come to ask for your help to stop the unjust treatment of these vulnerable children.

In December 2009, Palestinian Christian leaders wrote a letter to Christians everywhere asking for signs of hope, support and solidarity as they were suffering under many years of military occupation. On the anniversary of 50 years of occupation, as the situation was continuing to get worse and to become more desperate, they wrote a more urgent letter to the World Council of Churches looking for supportive action.

Help the MP to relate personally to the problem.

Through trips and solidarity work, I came to know the story of a family of a Palestinian Christian with whom I had worked in different contexts. I learnt that when their 2 brothers were teenagers, armed Israeli soldiers banged on the door of their house in the middle of the night and arrested them. The boys were in bed in pajamas. It was a cold night. Their father begged the soldiers to let the boys put on their shoes and socks. The soldiers not only refused but hit their father on the head with the butt of a gun knocking him down. Their father died the next day. The boys were in an Israeli military prison for 10 years. They were not guilty of any crime or act of violence. They were never told why they were there and had no access to legal counsel. Their family kept trying to find out why, but never could. That was some years ago now, but the family still finds it hard to talk about it.

I'm wondering [MP's name], what would be your expectation if you or a member of your family were to have an encounter with the police? How would you expect them to treat you or your family if you were accused of something?

[invite and wait for a response]

MP: In my younger years, I did get a couple of speeding tickets, but I paid the fine by mail and didn't have to go to court. I have no experience of what it's like to be arrested or to spend time in jail or prison.

Visitor: None of us likes to think of what it's like to be arrested, but we'd like for you to imagine how you would feel if your son or daughter got into trouble with the law. How would your child be treated in the Canadian justice system?

[invite and wait for a response]

MP: A few years ago, my son went to a party at a friend's house that got out of control. The police were called and one of his friends was arrested. The friend had to appear in court and was fined.

Visitor: How would you feel if your son or daughter were falsely accused?

[invite and wait for a response]

MP: I'm a law-abiding citizen. I've always believed that the police and the courts were there to protect me and my family and that I would have the funds necessary to hire a lawyer to defend my son or daughter if they were accused of a crime whether they were guilty or not.

Visitor: Israel is the only country in the world that systematically prosecutes children, Palestinian children that is, in military courts and have no fundamental fair trial rights. 3 out of every 4 of these children endure some form of physical violence at the hands of Israeli soldiers or police following arrest. In 97% of the cases, children are interrogated without legal counsel and without their parents. Whether there's a witness or not, children are frequently accused of throwing stones. They are brought into the court handcuffed and shackled and spoken to, or at least asked their name, in Hebrew, a language they do not know. If their parents are aware of the time and place of the court hearing, they're kept at a distance and might have to return many times before the actual court date.

Raise the MP's awareness of the extent of the problem.

According to UNICEF and the NGO Defence for Children International – Palestine, every year an average of 600-700 Palestinian children, some 12 years old or younger, are detained and/or prosecuted in the Israeli military court system. On November 29th, 2018, the Palestinian Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs indicated that 85,000 Palestinian children have been arrested since the year 2000, and 900 children were detained from January 2018 until the end of that October; the equivalent of two to three children a day. It also pointed out that nearly 60% of the Palestinian child detainees are transferred from the occupied territory to inside Israel, which is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Israel signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. Article 37 states that no child will be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment.... Israeli legislation and military and police practices routinely contravene international law including the 4th Geneva Convention.

How can our Canadian government justify large scale mistreatment of children or support a country that mistreats children in these ways? Canada has also signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Don't Canadians want to protect vulnerable children? What do you think Canada's position should be on this issue?

[invite and wait for a response]

MP: I recognize that this is a problem, but at the same time, Israel is an important trading partner. We have agreements with Israel for the exchange of military personnel and they purchase a lot of construction equipment from companies in Canada. It's unfair to single out Israel's violations of human rights to the exclusion of other countries. Canada is a strong supporter of the existence of Israel.

Relate the problem to the MP's ability to make a difference; invite the MP to act; and, ask what would help him/her feel more comfortable or confident in taking the action.

Visitor: [Name], please think about the vulnerability of children – yours, mine, anyone’s - of their being mistreated and traumatized by the military of a government that Canada supports in so many ways. We believe that if our Canadian Foreign Affairs does not speak to the leaders of the state of Israel about its systematic mistreatment of Palestinian children, that we, as Canadians, are complicit in that mistreatment. We do not believe our government can justify ignoring or supporting this mistreatment of children by one of our close allies. We want to ask you, “Would you be willing to talk with members of your caucus about this issue?”

[invite and wait for a response]

MP: To be honest, members of my caucus have been to Israel and have a different perspective on the problem. I want to present a balanced view that includes the Israeli perspective. I don’t want to be accused of being anti-Semitic.

Visitor: If the opportunity would arise, would you be willing to communicate with Minister [name] about the issue of the systematic mistreatment of Palestinian children?

[invite and wait for a response]

MP: Yes, provided you can give me some factual material that I can present to the Minister that clearly shows violations of children’s rights.

Visitor: Our time is up, but we will leave printed factual material for you: a copy of the “No Way to Treat A Child” petition for Palestinian children’s rights and a fact sheet about the military detention of Palestinian children and youth. We will also leave a copy of the recommendations for action in the official report of the 18 member Canada-Palestine Parliamentary Friendship Group which made a trip to Palestine and Israel in the spring of 2018. That report, by some of your fellow MPs, includes recommendations for action (urging) the appointment of a Special Envoy to promote, monitor and report on the human rights situation of Palestinian children living in the Palestinian Territory.

Again, we’d like to thank you for taking the time to listen and to talk about the treatment of Palestinian children and the importance of protecting vulnerable children and their rights.

Appendix: Getting to Know Your Member of Parliament³

Identifying and Locating Your Member of Parliament

The first step in effective communication with the House of Commons is determining the right person to contact. It is generally most effective to contact your own Member of Parliament - the woman or man who represents your electoral riding. As your elected official, this is the person who represents you and who must be sensitive to your views. Members of Parliament (MPs) maintain both an Ottawa office and a local office located back home. You can identify and locate your MP website www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members

There may be occasions, however, when it will be appropriate and helpful to contact other MPs. For example, when you have special expertise in a specific area in which a Parliamentary Committee is developing policy, your communication with them can be important

Once you know whom to contact, you can find their contact information here:

<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>.

Understanding the Role of House of Commons Staff

The bureaucracy carries on the business of government. Government officials remain as political parties are voted in and out of office. Bureaucrats are very influential in the development and implementation of laws and public policy. Effective relations with the civil service are very important.

Whether calling, writing, or visiting a House of Commons office, it is important to understand the role of your MP's staff members. Most MP's offices will have an assistant, handling your area of interest. Each Parliamentarian relies heavily on his or her staff to be knowledgeable and informed on the issues. Because the information and advice they provide is often critical in shaping the MP's opinion on an issue, any time spent discussing your views with them will be a good investment.

In addition to the staff members in the MP's personal office, the committees of Parliament also have professional staff members. These staff members are often more focused in their responsibilities. While a personal staff member usually has multiple subject areas of responsibility (e.g., covering science, defence, budget, environmental, and health issues), a committee staff member is often able to specialize in a small number of areas and to acquire

³ Adapted from https://cpa.ca/documents/advocacy_p5.htm.

expertise in them. These staff members work for the MP who chairs the committee or the vice-chair.

Staff members in MPs' personal riding offices serve still a different function. These staff members take care of the lawmaker's appointments and appearances in the riding. They also serve as caseworkers who help to resolve the problems of the riding's citizens as they relate to federal programs. For example, a riding office member can help determine why a Canadian Pension Plan recipient's cheque is late. Usually members of the riding office staff are not involved in issues of public policymaking. They are, however, trusted sources of information and have frequent contact with the politician.

Appendix: Make a Telephone Call⁴

When time is short or an issue is very pressing, you may be asked, or you may want to communicate with an elected official by telephone.

The guidelines for making an effective telephone call to an MP's office are similar to those for effective letter writing, with a few additions. Remember, you can reach your MP's Ottawa office by dialling the Canadian Government Public Information Office at (613) 992-4793, giving the name of your MP, and asking to be connected with her or his office.

When preparing for a telephone call, start at the beginning, just like you would in a letter, remembering that the person you talk to may have just gotten off the telephone with another constituent who had a very different concern. Be prepared with facts and information at your fingertips and a clear idea of what you want your telephone call to achieve.

Before placing a call, make sure:

- You have a clear idea of the message you want to communicate. Write the main points down and, if needed, refer to them when you make your call. If you know the bill numbers, reference them in your call.
- Your facts and arguments are organized in a clear, coherent manner. You will have only a few minutes to make them.
- You can state exactly what action you want taken on the issue.

You can ask to speak to your MP, but don't be disappointed if he or she is not available. Next ask to speak with the assistant who handles the subject of your interest. Remember, this is often just as effective. If neither the MP nor the relevant staff members are available, you can ask for a return call or leave a brief message, such as, "My name is Dr. Jane Jones and I am a professor of psychology at the University of Hometown. I am calling to ask for the MP's support on...". Be prepared to give your address or telephone number in case the MP wants to respond.

Be persistent but courteous. You may have to call back several times before you get through to either the staff person or the MP. Don't be discouraged – no one is trying to avoid you. Just remember MPs get many calls each day – keep trying.

⁴ Adapted from https://cpa.ca/documents/advocacy_p5.htm.

Appendix: Build Relationships with Elected Officials⁵

Good politics depend on ongoing ties with both your MP and their staff.

One of the most effective ways to keep in touch is to get to know staff in your MP's personal riding office. Riding offices are always looking for activities for the MP while he or she is in the Riding - they generally welcome suggestions for events, especially if there is some press potential. Contact the local office of your MP, tell them what you are doing, and invite the MP to be of the event. The riding director can then call the Ottawa office to suggest that this might be a good event for the MP to attend.

There are a wide variety of ways to interact with your elected officials. Some include:

- Invite your member of parliament to community/church meals/barbeques events
- Invite representatives to be panelists at conferences or meetings
- Attend community events hosted by the member of parliament in your riding.

⁵ https://cpa.ca/documents/advocacy_p5.htm

Appendix: Recommendations from Canada-Palestine Parliamentary Group

Recommendations from MP Visit to Palestine and Israel (March 30 to April 6, 2018)

WHEREAS we support the peaceful Resolution of all issues between the peoples of Israeli and Palestine, unconditionally condemn violence on all sides, and firmly subscribe to the goal of establishing secure, sovereign states for each.

WE RECOMMEND AS FOLLOWS:

RECOMMENDATION #1

That the government should work with international partners to:

- appoint a Special Envoy to promote, monitor and report on the human rights situation of Palestinian children living in the Palestinian territory, specifically undertaking an evaluative analysis to 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;
- take concrete steps to promote greater respect for human rights and increase protections for Palestinian children;
- hold Israeli military authorities accountable to their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law;
- keep working to encourage all parties to take necessary diplomatic efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace for Palestinians and Israelis.

RECOMMENDATION #2

That the government continue and increase its financial assistance to UNWRA and spearhead an effort among international partners to assist UNWRA financially.

RECOMMENDATION #3

That the government use all available diplomatic efforts, including votes at the United Nations, to bring about a halt to Israeli settlement construction in the Palestinian territories.

Appendix: Resources

Websites

No Way to Treat a Child (NWTTAC)

<https://nwtac.dci-palestine.org/about>

Imprisoning a Generation

www.anemoia.net

United Nations Rights of the Child

www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/children

Videos

Created by No Way to Treat a Child:

- **Detaining Dreams**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rw69pLiLqw
- **Study Guide for Detaining Dreams**
https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/dcipalestine/pages/1926/attachments/original/1501709437/Detaining_Dreams_Study_Guide_NWTTAC.pdf?1501709437
- **Night Raid Photo Exhibit**
<https://vimeo.com/116772944>
- **Defence for Children International - Palestine**
www.facebook.com/pg/DCIPS/videos - short videos
- **DCI-P YouTube channel**
www.youtube.com/user/DCIPS
- ***Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Danger of a Single Story***
www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?...en
- **Imprisoning a Generation**
www.anemoia.net
(available for screening through a licensing agreement with The United Church of Canada)

