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Hon. Chrystia Freeland
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Global Affairs Canada

March 6, 2017

Dear Minister Freeland,

I write to you today regarding Israeli settlements, and specifically with regard to the urgent case of Khan Al Ahmar, a Palestinian Bedouin village in the West Bank scheduled for demolition.

As you know, in February the Israeli Knesset approved legislation that retroactively legalizes illegal outposts built on privately owned Palestinian land – an issue I raised with you in the House of Commons last month. This action by the Knesset was condemned by the United Nations and by many members of the international community. While you have publicly noted that settlements are illegal under international law, I respectfully request that Canada use the goodwill it has with Israel to take a much stronger position condemning the recent law approved by the Knesset, and to urge the Israeli government to abandon its current policy, which is a hindrance to peace.

With regard to the planned demolition of Palestinian village of Khan Al Ahmar in the occupied West Bank, I have received many letters from Canadians concerned about this planned demolition and the well-being of the residents of the village.

Khan Al Ahmar, situated in an area earmarked for future expansion of the Israeli settlement Ma'ale Adumim, is being targeted for demolition and its residents will be forcibly evicted. Over 140 Palestinians, more than half of them children, would be affected by this demolition. The village primary school, made of tires and mud, was built with the support of international donors and serves around 170 children from Bedouin communities in the area.

On February 22 2017, the Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and UN Development Activities for the occupied Palestinian territory, Robert Piper, said: "*Khan al Ahmar is one of the most vulnerable communities in the West Bank, struggling to maintain a minimum standard of living in the face of intense pressure from the Israeli authorities to move to a planned relocation site... This is unacceptable and it must stop.*" Moreover, on February 28 2017, the EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah called upon Israel "*not to carry out demolitions in (Khan al Ahmar). Displacing the community would be in contravention with Israel's obligations as an occupying power under international humanitarian law.*"

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) notes that

Forced displacement has a series of immediate and longer-term physical, socio-economic and psycho-social impacts on Palestinian families. It deprives them of their home and land – often their main asset – and frequently results in disruption to livelihoods, a reduced standard of living and limited access to basic services. The impact on children can be particularly devastating. (OCHA Occupied Palestinian Territory website)

Minister, I urge you to directly raise concerns about settlements, forced displacement and demolitions with your Israeli counterpart at the earliest opportunity. It is important that Canada clearly convey that these activities are not only illegal, but also greatly hinder the possibility of a two-state solution to the conflict.

New Democrats remain committed to working with partners for peace and justice in Israel and Palestine, within a framework of respect for United Nations resolutions and international law, so that Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace and security in viable, independent states within negotiated, agreed-upon borders.

Canada must now prioritize support of international efforts to bring the two sides back to the negotiating table, the only hope for securing a lasting and just peace in the region.

I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Hélène Laverdière

MP for Laurier – Sainte-Marie
NDP Critic for Foreign Affairs

CC: The Right Rev. Jordan Cantwell, Moderator of the United Church of Canada