



The Hill Times (Ottawa, ON)

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NEWS

As ceasefire debate rages at home, Canada walks fine line at UN between support for Israel and concern for Palestinians' welfare, say observers

Stronger language about humanitarian obligations show Canada's recognition that Palestinian civilians are 'caught in the middle' of conflict, says Gilles Rivard.

STEPHEN JEFFERY

Canada's decision to abstain from a United Nations resolution calling for a "humanitarian truce" in the Gaza Strip shows dissatisfaction with the body's failure to condemn Hamas, but the country's language around the conflict appears more nuanced than during previous wars in the region, according to some ex-diplomats.

"I think Canada is at this moment not keeping its distance, but we want to show that we have to be careful with that situation. Even though we're 100 per cent supportive of Israel, we are very concerned about their action in Gaza," said Gilles Rivard, a former Canadian deputy permanent representative to the United Nations. "There's a lot of people in Gaza that have nothing to do with it, but they are like a piece of ham between two pieces of bread. They're caught in the middle."

Canada was one of 45 countries to ab-

stain from a vote in the United Nations General Assembly about the "protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations." The 14-point resolution included calls for an "immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce," that all parties abide by international law, the unhindered provision of essential goods, services, and humanitarian access to civilians in Gaza, and the unconditional release of all "captives."

The resolution passed with the support of 120 member states, while 14—including Israel and the United States—were opposed. All other members of the G7 joined Canada in abstaining.

Canada earlier proposed an amendment adding that the General Assembly "unequivocally rejects and condemns the terrorist attacks by Hamas that took place in Israel starting on 7 October 2023 and the taking of hostages, demands the safety, well-being and humane treatment of the hostages in com-

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Irwin Cotler, left, international chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for human rights, and Iddo Moed, right, Israel's ambassador to Canada, at a press scrum on Oct. 30 on the Hill. Moed told reporters that Israel will not consider a ceasefire because 'we have a murderer shooting at us, continuing to shoot at us, and there is no reason why we should stop.' The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

pliance with international law, and calls for their immediate and unconditional release."

The amendment failed to attain the two-thirds majority required—88 countries in favour, 55 against, and 23 abstentions—though all other G7 countries voted in favour.

In a statement published after the resolution, Global Affairs Canada said the amendment was "an effort to ensure the General Assembly acknowledged that this situation arose because of unconscionable terrorist attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians" on Oct. 7. "The reso-

lution as drafted did not mention this fact. We consider it essential that the international community speak clearly in condemning this terrorism by Hamas,” the statement said, going on to describe Canada as “disappointed by the failure of the General Assembly to condemn Hamas.”

Bob Rae, Canada’s permanent representative to the UN, told the General Assembly prior to the vote on the amendment that the body must demonstrate to Palestinian and Israeli civilians that they acknowledge their plight, and noted there was “no hierarchy” of death. But he said that Canada could not support the text of the resolution as it was drafted, and that “the critical reason for how we got here has already been forgotten by so many, as if it never happened.”

On the amendment, Rae said that “facts are facts. On Oct. 7, Hamas committed attacks of terror by killing and kidnapping innocent men, women, and children. We, in this Assembly, have an obligation to name two things not mentioned in the draft resolution—the organization that bears responsibility for those events and its consequences, and the deliberate cruelty of the murders and hostage-taking that is still underway.”

Rivard said that such resolutions are mostly symbolic, but can be useful for gauging the positions and nuances of each member state. “You can debate for hours about a sentence because it sends a signal of a country’s position,” he said. “It gave us an opportunity to project how Canada sees the situation, and this is the objective of this kind of resolution.”

When trying to move such amendments in the UN General Assembly, Rivard

said missions would hold consultations and discussions with a range of different countries to gauge their perspectives and the kind of language that would be acceptable to them.

“You consult your allies, your friendly countries, and also countries with whom you have good relations but that have different views,” he said. “You can consult people from the Non-Aligned Movement, from the G77, and you’re also in close consultation with Ottawa. If you want to modify the language, there is consultation at the public service level and political level, and then you come up with a proposal to make some amendments.”

Saeid Mirzaei Yengejeh, a University of Ottawa law professor who spent more than 30 years working at the United Nations, including on co-ordinating the positions of the Non-Aligned Movement, said the language Canada used in its amendment included “naming and shaming” that may not have been helpful in humanitarian objectives.

“That amendment called for the condemnation of Hamas, while at the same time asking for the release of hostages. These two do not go together,” he said. “If you want an organization to release hostages, you can’t first condemn them and then ask for something.”

“If the aim was for [Canada] to align itself with the U.S. and Israel, that works for that purpose,” he said of Canada’s amendment. “If the aim was to make arrangements for the release of hostages, the resolution was not conducive to that purpose.”

Michael Lynk, a former UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian Territory, said the abstention may

not have happened without the internal debates within the Liberal caucus on the need for a ceasefire.

“Justin Trudeau has a caucus that is increasingly reflecting the diversity of Canadians, including Arab Canadians, and Muslim Canadians, and Canadians whose ancestry comes from the Global South,” said Lynk, who is an associate professor at Western University’s law faculty. “If it hadn’t been for that split, and the ongoing debate in the Liberal caucus, Canada likely would have voted ‘no’ along with the United States. This is, if you’d like, a tiny victory, but one can hope for a lot more from Canada.”

Lynk said Hamas deserved to be condemned at the UN, and that indiscriminate attacks on civilians were clear violations of international law and “prima facie war crimes.” But he said that the amendment was bound to fail if it only cited the “violations of international law by one side.”

“[Canada] would have had a much better chance of getting a victory on that amendment if it had included a resolution that equally condemned and criticized the violations of international law by both sides,” he said.

At the time of publication, the Israel Defence Forces said more than 1,400 Israelis were killed during or in the aftermath of Oct. 7, of which more than 1,000 were civilians. At least 240 people were taken hostage.

An official Israeli source told Canadian reporters that between 1,200 and 1,500 Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters took part in the attack on the ground, while about 4,200 rockets were launched.

The IDF also said 19 soldiers have been

killed in battles inside the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, Gaza's health ministry said more than 9,000 Palestinians have been killed in the territory, though did not provide a breakdown between civilians and fighters. Another 133 Palestinians have been killed in the occupied West Bank, according to the Palestinian Authority's health ministry, while an Israeli military reservist was also killed.

Calls continue in Canada for ceasefire
In Canada, both the Liberal government and Conservative opposition have called for humanitarian pauses in order to provide necessary aid and supplies to civilians.

Some members of the Liberal caucus want Canada to call for a ceasefire, as has the NDP. The New Democrat caucus sent a letter to Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) on Nov. 1 calling for a ceasefire, and said that more than 100,000 Canadians had written to the party about the issue.

Pro-Palestinian activists held sit-ins at 17 MPs' offices in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec on Oct. 30 calling for a ceasefire.

The same day, Iddo Moed, Israel's ambassador to Canada, told reporters that his country would not "cease fire because we have a murderer shooting at us, continuing to shoot at us, and there is no reason why we should stop. He will just continue to do more."

The Israeli Embassy in Canada shared video with journalists on Oct. 30 and Nov. 2 of the Oct. 7 attack and its aftermath as captured by security cameras, portable cameras strapped to Hamas militants, and images from first responders.

The videos included footage of shootings of Israeli civilians, the breaching of border fences, and the loading of bodies into vehicles. The first responder footage, taken in the aftermath of the shootings, included images of blood-stained houses and shelters.

Official Israeli sources said the 10-minute video shown to reporters on Oct. 30 had also been shown to Canadian government officials, and was intended to demonstrate the full extent of the horrors committed during the attacks. They compared it to the Allied forces' distribution of footage from liberated Nazi death camps at the end of the Second World War.

A longer, 43-minute video was shown to reporters, including from The Hill Times, on Nov. 2, and included footage of attacks on kibbutzim, IDF bases, and the Nova music festival. It included footage of the murder of civilians, desecration of corpses, and the kidnapping of hostages.

The longer video had not yet been shown to Canadian government representatives at the time of publication, according to officials.

Relatives of some of those killed or taken hostage during the Oct. 7 attacks visited Ottawa to meet with Trudeau, other MPs, and the media last week. During a press conference on Oct. 30, they said that efforts to see the hostages released should be the top priority for all.

"I'm sure that the international pressure isn't enough, because they're still there," said Itay Raviv, whose uncle and aunt were kidnapped from their home in the Kibbutz Nir Oz, and whose cousin was killed. "Hamas is a terror organization and they do not co-operate with any

international organization... the Red Cross hasn't visited the hostages... the whole world needs to deal with this as a top priority... every day, every hour that they're there is a crime against humanity."

Toronto-based Aharon Brodutch, whose sister-in-law was kidnapped from Kibbutz Kfar Aza with her three children, said both Israeli and international efforts should be solely focused on ensuring the safe return of all hostages.

"This is not about taking sides in a conflict, this is very basic. Every person who is having dinner with his family and sees his children realizes that children don't belong in tunnels while you're being held hostage," he said. "Any kind of pressure on all sides that can be put to end this, that's what needs to be done."

sjeffery@hilltimes.com The Hill Times
How Countries Voted on the UN Resolutions on Middle East, Oct. 27, 2023: Resolution Calling for a Sustained Humanitarian Truce between Israel and Hamas, Leading to Cessation of Hostilities: YES (120) Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, France, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya,

Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, North Korea, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, Qatar, Russia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Switzerland, Syria, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen, Zimbabwe NO (14) Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Fiji, Guatemala, Hungary, Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Tonga, United States of America ABSTAIN (45) Canada, Albania, Australia, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Iceland, India, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kiribati, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Monaco, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Palau, Panama, Philippines, Poland, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, South Korea, South Sudan, Sweden, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Zambia DID NOT VOTE (14) Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Eswatini, Jamaica, Liberia, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, Togo, Turkmenistan, Venezuela How Countries Voted on Canada's Amendment to Condemn Hamas:(did not pass) YES (88) Canada, Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Barbados, Belgium, Bhutan, Bosnia and

Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kiribati, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Micronesia, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Myanmar, Nauru, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Seychelles, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Korea, South Sudan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay NO (55) Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belize, Bolivia, Belarus, Brunei, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Comoros, Congo, Cuba, North Korea, Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Gambia, Guinea, Guyana, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Niger, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Tanzania, Yemen ABSTAIN (23) Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Botswana, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Jamaica, Laos, Lesotho, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nepal, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Serbia, Suriname, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago OTHER (25) Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Bu-

rundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Gabon, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela

Figure:

Israeli ambassador to Canada Iddo Moed scrums with reporters after a press conference in the National Press Theatre on Oct. 30, 2023, held by Israeli survivors and families of victims of the conflict in Israel and Gaza. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Bob Rae, Canada's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations, told the UN General Assembly that member states must acknowledge 'the organization that bears responsibility for those events and its consequences, and the deliberate cruelty of the murders and hostage-taking that is still underway.' The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Aharon Brodutch, whose brother's family is believed to be among the 240 hostages taken by Hamas on Oct. 7, said it was vital that the release of those held captive be Israel and the international community's top priority. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade