

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – MAY 2, 2024

**NEWS RELEASE – CANADA MUST INCREASE PRESSURE ON ISRAEL TO
PERMIT PALESTINIANS SELECTED UNDER TRV PROGRAM TO EXIT GAZA**

The Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers (CARL) is alarmed by reports that the Government of Israel has not permitted a single person selected under Canada's Temporary Resident Visa program ("the program") for Gazans to safely exit Gaza. The denial of exit not only puts these individuals' lives at risk but is a grave violation of Palestinians' fundamental right to exit Gaza, enshrined in human rights treaties including the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

CARL urges Canada to maintain diplomatic pressure on Israel to immediately allow individuals selected for onward travel to Canada to exit Gaza via Rafah and calls upon the Governments of Israel and Egypt to facilitate swift exit for those individuals.

In response to pressure from the public and organizations, including CARL, on December 21, 2023, the Government of Canada announced [its temporary resident visa program](#) for Gazans. Under the program, Canadian citizens and permanent residents can sponsor their family members currently in Gaza to travel to Canada on three-year temporary resident visas. Hundreds of applications were submitted and received within days of the program opening. All applications were subject to security screenings by Canadian security partners based on information provided on an "enhanced biographic form", serving as a substitute for biometric screening which was not possible while applicants were still in Gaza. This screening resulted in a list of Gazans who were provisionally approved for travel to Canada under the program.

Canada has subsequently provided lists of names of provisionally approved applicants to the governments of Israel and Egypt with a request that they be allowed to exit Gaza into Egypt through the Rafah crossing. In Egypt, these individuals would then undergo biometric examinations and final processing before journeying onward to Canada. More than three months after Canada's program began receiving applications, the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) unit has not approved a single person on a Canadian list to exit. Instead, Palestinians are trapped in Gaza, where numerous institutions and organizations have raised concerns of a genocide.

All persons have the right to leave their country to seek asylum abroad. This has been the bedrock of international refugee law for 75 years. Preventing Palestinians from leaving, especially when Canada is willing to accept them, is an egregious

violation of this right. The blanket refusal to let anyone on the list cross out of Gaza – which includes women and children – is inconsistent with any stated security concern, particularly considering Canada's up-front security screening of applicants. Whole classes of people cannot be denied the ability to leave a country under international law.

Canadian and international media have reported that as a result of the blockage of exit from Gaza through official channels, some visa applicants under the program have paid large sums of money to facilitators and Egyptian border agents to ensure passage to Egypt.

CARL is deeply concerned that Canada's special measures, intended to form a humanitarian response for a small number of individuals affected by the current situation, may fail to come to fruition. To ensure that this does not become a reality, CARL urges Canada to maintain pressure on the Government of Israel to permit Palestinians selected under Canada's program to exit without further delay and to respect all Palestinians' rights of mobility under international law moving forward. CARL also urges Canada to engage with Egyptian authorities to develop alternative pathways should discussions with Israel remain deadlocked.

ABOUT CARL:

The Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers (CARL) is a not-for-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to advocating for the legal rights of refugees and other vulnerable migrants. Our member includes approximately 400 lawyers, academics and law students from across Canada.

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