



KAIROS Response to CBC's *The National* Program Feb. 3, 2010

On the February 3 edition of CBC's *The National*, Wendy Mesley raised the question of KAIROS' recent defunding and the crisis at Rights and Democracy within the framework of changing Canadian policy on Israeli and Palestine.

Asking "Is Stephen Harper Canada's most Pro-Israel Prime Minister?" Mesley outlined how Canada's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has shifted from historical support for an independent and secure Israeli state alongside an independent, secure and viable Palestinian State to complete abstention from UN votes on the issue. Her report raised the question of whether KAIROS funding was cut because of our position on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Two serious questions emerge. One relates to what role Canada should play in Israel-Palestine, where the human rights, livelihoods and futures of two peoples are at stake. The reversal of 60 years of balanced policy on as complex an issue as Israel and Palestine should not be taken lightly.

But neither should the second question, which concerns the safety of democratic space in Canada, specifically the ability to speak out on serious human rights issues, and our ability to support our neighbours in the Global South who are working to end poverty and oppression. The attack on KAIROS funding has resulted in a loss of human rights funding to our partners around the world. This will play out not just in the everyday lives of farmers in Palestine, but also in Colombia, Mexico, Sudan, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

For more than 30 years, CIDA has worked with KAIROS and its predecessor organizations to bring forward the voices and concerns of groups in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East who are working for positive long-term change. They work on issues of peace, poverty, gender violence, access to clean drinking water and sustainable environments.

The need for this work has not changed. But the ability of Canadian non-governmental organizations –and by extension the partner organizations in the global South who are the real victims in this funding cut– to do this work is being seriously compromised.

We thank Wendy Mesley for bringing this debate forward.

4 February, 2010