

December 10, 2009

Hon Lawrence Cannon
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Suite 418N, Centre Block
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Cannon,

I am writing you on the matter concerning a resident of London, Mr. Khaled Al Sabawi. His family founded a business in the occupied Palestinian territory in the fields of insurance, construction, and green energy. The business employs hundreds of people within the territory and purchases assets and services from Israel. His business was involved in the design and installation of the first geothermal heating and cooling systems in the entire Middle East region and was implemented in Ramallah with direct support by the Canadian Geo-exchange Coalition.

In recent months however, while traveling to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, it was made clear to Mr. Al Sabawi that not every country holds the Canadian passport in the same high esteem that it has traditionally garnered. Israeli border control has begun a policy of discrimination against Canadian passport holders doing business or visiting East Jerusalem and the West Bank. It has become, for Mr. Al Sabawi, a routine experience to spend eight hours at an Israeli controlled port of entry to finally be interrogated and denied entry for no other apparent reason than his intention to do business in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Since January 2009, Israeli border control has denied Mr. Al Sabawi entry three times and granted him a limited or restricted visa on two other occasions. The arbitrary visas range from one week to one month and purport to limit access to "Palestinian Authority only" which is not an area that even ministries within the Israeli government were able to delineate (according to consular staff at the Canadian Mission in Ramallah).

When Mr. Al Sabawi and his family travel to Israel and its controlled areas, the Canadian passport is not being respected. Mr. Al Sabawi feels that they are not be treated as Canadians; rather, they

are discriminated against because of their Palestinian heritage and ties to the occupied Palestinian territories. He has raised this issue on more than one occasion with the Canadian Head of Mission in Ramallah and the Canadian Embassy in Te-Aviv. His case is particularly well known to consular staff.

While Israeli discrimination and harassment was taking place, the United States Government responded in a timely fashion stating that it has “repeatedly told the Government of Israel that it expects all American citizens to be treated equally, regardless of their national origin or other citizenship, and has let the Government of Israel know that these restrictions unfairly impact Palestinian and Arab American travellers and are not acceptable.” The Canadian Government has not officially condemned Israel’s discrimination towards Canadian citizens. Only a travel advisory has been issued, which was not only late but also lacked the necessary weight. It left Mr. Al Sabawi feeling that his Canadian government did not have his best interests at heart.

I am asking that the Canadian government protect all of its citizens when they are harassed and discriminated against by foreign agents in a manner which violates international human rights law and also, in this case, the Oslo Accords (which Canada supports). I would appreciate some clarification on what is being done to protect the rights of Canadian citizens travelling to, visiting and working in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Such harassment and discrimination faced by Canadian citizens should be condemned from an official perspective in line with other Western democracies. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Irene Mathyssen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Irene Mathyssen

cc. Prime Minister Stephen Harper
Hon. Jason Kenny
Hon. Jack Layton, Leader, NDP
Paul Dewar, NDP Foreign Affairs Critic
Olivia Chow, NDP Citizenship and Immigration Critic
Mr. Khaled Al Sabawi