

THE CANADIAN JEWISH NEWS

CJN

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From the Archives | Godspell



ONTARIO JEWISH ARCHIVES, BLANKENSTEIN FAMILY HERITAGE CENTRE

Among the photos included in a recent acquisition from the Salsberg family is this cast photo from the Royal Alexander Theatre's 1972 production of *Godspell* starring Gerry Salsberg (lower right). Pictured, from left, are: Jayne Eastwood, Martin Short, Andrea Martin, Avril Chown, Derek McGrath, [unidentified], Eugene Levy, Gilda Radner, Gerry Salsberg and Rudy Webb.

SeeJN | At the Taj Mahal



AVI OHAYON/GPO/FLASH 90 PHOTO

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife Sara visit the Taj Mahal on Jan. 16. They were on a week-long state visit to India.

From Yoni's Desk

Trudeau would be wise to follow Harper on UNRWA

Eight years ago this month, the Conservative government of Stephen Harper cut federal funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), deciding instead to directly fund specific Palestinian projects. Up until that point, Canada had been providing \$10 million a year for the United Nations agency's work in Palestinian refugee camps. But that money, which went directly to the Palestinian Authority's (PA) general operating fund, was difficult to track. And so, seeking to "ensure accountability and foster democracy" in the PA, as Treasury Board president Vic Toews put it at the time, the government opted for another route.

To be sure, Canada was still pledging generous support for the Palestinians – to the tune of \$300 million over a five-year period – but Toews explained that Ottawa wanted "to put that money only into programs that are consistent with Canadian values," and focus on "institution-building in the PA, such as building a proper functioning justice system." The government pledged \$20 million to train prosecutors, judges, and police, and build courthouses in Ramallah, Hebron and Tulkarm, in order to build up the Palestinian judicial sector.

"A fair and effective system of criminal justice with an efficient and independent prosecutions office and attorney general's office is integral to the process, and to securing long-term peace and stability in the Middle East," Toews said.

That was the right decision, of course. After all, as *CJN* columnist Gil Troy once opined, UNRWA is "the great enabler of Palestinian delusions, extremism and violence." Its teachers and aid workers have publicly incited Palestinian violence against Israel. In the span of two weeks during the summer of 2014, the organization admitted to discovering stockpiles of weapons in its schools. UNRWA has been accused of employing Hamas members, and seconding its ambulances to the Gaza terrorist group. And that's without even getting into the fundamental question of why a supposedly neutral UN agency is so heavily biased in favour of the Palestinians.

And yet, in November 2016, the new Liberal government restored funding to UNRWA. "We want to see Palestinian refugee children in classrooms where they can learn universal values of tolerance and respect," International Development Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau said then. "Vulnerable Palestinians deserve all the opportunities they can to contribute positively to their communities and Canada's funding will help to better the lives of millions of refugees."

The Liberal's renewed funding of UNRWA (which Ottawa extended for another year in 2017) came with safeguards designed to dispel concerns about where the money was going. Assurances were made that there would be "robust oversight," "an enhanced accountability network," and that UNRWA staff would be screened. The funding included anti-terrorism provisions and training for UNRWA employees on how to appropriately use social media. Such precautions are welcome, but it's hard not to be skeptical about an organization as profoundly corrupt as UNRWA has been proven to be.

Eight years ago, Ottawa led the way by saying no to UNRWA even as it said yes to helping the Palestinian people. The Harper Conservatives set an example, one that the Trudeau Liberals would be wise to recall as they consider funding UNRWA in 2018 and beyond. ■ — YONI