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August 1, 2014

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper,  
Prime Minister of Canada,  
Office of the Prime Minister,  
80 Wellington Street,  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Fax: 1 613 941 6900  
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Dear Prime Minister Stephen Harper:

I write to you as a deeply concerned Canadian citizen, as a fellow Christian, and as Moderator of The United Church of Canada. I write to express my anguish at what is happening in Gaza and in Israel. I write to implore you, as leader of the Government of Canada, to do all that you can to convince the governments of both Israel and Gaza to stop the violence. We welcomed the July 31<sup>st</sup> announcement of a 72-hour ceasefire, only to see it fail again. I ask that you do all that is possible to ensure a climate for a durable ceasefire, so that the hard work of committed negotiations for a lasting and just peace might occur.

We know that the situation is complex and that there are several interpretations of the present war between Israel and Gaza. For many years, the United Church has struggled to find ways to hear the cries of both the people of Israel and the people of Palestine; we are committed to a resolution rooted in justice that includes internationally recognized borders and security for both peoples.

Your government has demanded that Hamas stop contributing to the ongoing violence—stop the rockets, stop the tunnelling, stop the rhetoric, and accept Israel's right to exist within internationally recognized borders.

We therefore expect our government to make similar demands of Israel. Like many Canadians, I expect our government to uphold international law and Canadian values of equality. Israel has every right to demand security, to live without fear of teenagers being kidnapped and killed and of rockets falling on its cities. But how can this invasion of Gaza, so overwhelming, destructive, and so disproportionate, bring real peace and security? If obtained at the expense of thousands of innocent lives, can it last? Hundreds of Palestinian civilians have been killed men, women and children—*children!* Thousands have been injured. The living conditions in Gaza even prior to the invasion are appalling—so many people lack food, clean water, electrical power, and medical assistance. Such conditions, exacerbated by the siege for the past seven years, are literally life-threatening.

Your government has built and nurtured a close working relationship with Israel. I ask that your government use this relationship to exert all influence to demand a stop to this invasion and siege.

I also ask that the larger picture be recognized. Canada must insist that Israel stop its occupation of the Palestinian territories and dismantle the settlements. Yes, Israel has the right to exist, in safety and

security. So do Palestinians. Why does Israel not recognize the right of Palestine to exist within internationally recognized borders?

I am asking that our government take international leadership to convince the Palestinians and the Israelis to engage in serious negotiations, to set aside the blame games and propaganda war. The agreement to a ceasefire and pressure to meet in Egypt for discussion and negotiations must be supported by Canada and all those who seek a just peace. Concrete steps must be taken toward a just and peaceful end of the conflicts that have ripped this land apart for so many years, so that ordinary people on all sides of every border will know the great gift of peace.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Paterson". The signature is written in black ink and includes a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Gary Paterson (The Right Reverend)  
Moderator  
The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada

cc: The Honourable John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
The Honourable Thomas Mulcair, The Leader of the Official Opposition  
Justin Trudeau, MP, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada  
Mr. Mario Beaulieu, MP, Leader of the Bloc Québécois  
Elizabeth May, MP, Leader of the Green Party of Canada