Gaza TRV Reunification Advocacy Toolkit

2025 Federal Election Edition



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

CANADIAN MUSLIM PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

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OVERVIEW

To educate and mobilize the public, media, and policymakers about the systemic failures of Canada's Gaza TRV program and advocate for immediate reforms and expanded humanitarian support for Palestinian families affected by the ongoing crisis.

INTRODUCTION: Why This Toolkit Matters – And Why Now

As Canada engages in a pivotal federal election, this is the moment for every Canadian to demand real leadership, fairness, and accountability from those seeking to represent us in Parliament. For Palestinian Canadians, one of the most urgent issues is Canada's failure to implement a functional and just family reunification program for loved ones fleeing Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza.

In the face of immense injustice, many Canadians have felt helpless - unsure of how to meaningfully support Palestinians. This toolkit is a powerful reminder that we are not powerless. The Canadian government acts in our name and with our tax dollars. We CAN demand that it meet its obligations, uphold international law, demonstrate Canadian values for humanity and action public commitments. Demanding action from our officials is a tangible, focused way for Canadians to support Palestinian families.

This toolkit has been developed to:

- Equip you with the facts, and key talking points about the Gaza Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) program.
- Demonstrate how the program's systemic failures reflect anti-Palestinian racism within Canada's immigration system.
- Offer concrete ways you can engage candidates, raise awareness, and pressure government officials.

Skip to page 8 for direct talking points and guidance on engaging with candidates.

Let's turn grief into action and solidarity into change. Let's make it impossible for our leaders to look away.













PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND CURRENT STATUS

In January 2024, following sustained advocacy by Palestinian Canadians and civil society organizations, Canada announced a special immigration program to facilitate family reunification for those with loved ones trapped in Gaza: the Gaza Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) Program. Introduced under Section 25.2 of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), the program was framed as a humanitarian measure — but in practice, it has failed to deliver meaningful protection.

Key Facts and Issues

The Gaza TRV program was initially capped at **1,000 applications** but was later expanded to accommodate up to 5,000. As of March 6, 2025, the program has stopped accepting new applications after receiving submissions for the maximum number of individuals allowed under this cap. However, reaching this intake limit does **NOT** mean the program has fulfilled its commitment or successfully reunited families. In fact, the vast majority of applicants remain stranded, with only a small fraction having been approved - let alone evacuated. Crucially, the program is temporary and does not offer a pathway to permanent residence, despite the life-threatening conditions applicants are fleeing.

Application Numbers and Geographic Breakdown

Over 5,000 applications have been submitted under this program. Of these, approximately 3,200 individuals remain in Gaza, while 1,800 are currently in Egypt. In Egypt, around 1,085 applications have been approved, but over 700 individuals are still waiting on the Canadian government - many of whom have already completed biometric collection and other eligibility requirements.

As of the publishing date of this toolkit, from within Gaza, only 503 individuals have been moved to the evacuation list since January 2024, and a mere 41 have actually been evacuated. Notably, all evacuees had valid biometrics on file - a requirement that has become a major and absurd barrier to access. Canada expected applicants in Gaza - an active war zone under siege and blockade - to provide biometrics despite the complete absence of biometric collection infrastructure in the territory. This expectation has effectively excluded many eligible applicants and created an impossible hurdle for those in desperate need of protection.

In most of the recent evacuation cases, the actual movement of individuals out of Gaza appears to have been facilitated not by the Canadian government, but by community organizations or third-party efforts.

Widespread Family Separation

One of the program's most glaring failures is the ongoing separation of families across Gaza, Egypt, and Canada. At least 85 families remain apart, including situations where children were evacuated but their parents were left behind, with biometrics used as an excuse. This serves as yet another intentional tactic to inflict suffering on Palestinians. Two recent examples, the Alyazji and AbuAmrah families, highlight this tragic reality: the children of these families were brought to safety, while their mothers remain trapped in Gaza. These cases are part of a larger trend, where a significant number of applicants are elderly parents and children under 18 - both groups that are particularly vulnerable, yet still stranded due to bureaucratic hurdles.













Humanitarian Harm and Medical Urgency

The delay and dysfunction of this program do not just have administrative implications — the consequences are life-threatening. An analysis of over 300 family feedback submissions shows that **52** cases involve serious or urgent medical needs. Reported conditions include cardiac issues, cancer,

pediatric conditions like hydrocephalus and thalassemia, chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, and trauma-related psychological injuries. Several cases also involve disabled children and high-risk pregnancies.

Even more enraging is the fact that at least six families have lost loved ones while waiting for security clearance or visa approval. The most devastating of these is the case of Abeer Hilles, who lost her husband and three children while still awaiting processing.

Extreme Delays in Security Screening

Perhaps the most persistent issue is the prolonged and intentionally opaque security screening process. More than 100 families have been waiting for 9 to 14 months with no progress - even after passing eligibility checks, submitting biometrics, and being in active communication with IRCC. These delays affect applicants both in Gaza and in Cairo, and the lack of transparency or updates from IRCC has only deepened the community's distress.

KEY FAILURES AND CRITICISMS

Ineffectiveness in Facilitating Evacuations

- Despite the program's life-saving intent, very few Gazans have successfully reached Canada.
- As of October 2024, only a small fraction of the 5,000 promised visas had resulted in actual • evacuations. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the Canadian government has communicated any concrete numbers or progress to Israeli and Egyptian officials regarding the number of evacuees within Gaza. This lack of coordination is concerning and points to systemic inefficiencies. In comparison, other countries (e.g., the US and UK evacuating Afghan nationals) have successfully carried out large-scale evacuations from similar conflict zones, demonstrating that such efforts are feasible when proper measures are in place.
- The government has also failed to provide regular updates, particularly to families and the public, . on the status of applications, approvals, and timelines. This lack of transparency has left families in the dark, unsure of when or if their loved ones will be evacuated.
- This intentional withholding of information, compounded by the slow pace of evacuations, has • created confusion and exacerbated the distress of families who are desperately trying to protect their loved ones.













Unrealistic and Onerous Requirements

- Applicants faced confusing, unrealistic, and constantly shifting criteria, making the process • inaccessible and opaque from the outset. Advocates have correctly questioned the intentionality of this as a barrier.
- Required documentation was often impossible to obtain amid war and displacement in Gaza, • including:
 - Full employment history since age 16;
 - Social media handles;
 - Proof of family relationships under Canadian legal standards;
 - Identification of the origin of each and every scar and injury, despite the traumatic circumstances of war and displacement.
- These demands were not only out of touch with the realities on the ground they were intentionally unreasonable. Amid constant bombardment and the collapse of basic infrastructure, even accessing communication or retrieving documents was often impossible.
- Many families were not informed clearly about what documents were needed, or were given contradictory instructions by immigration officials, further exacerbating delays and confusion.
 - IRCC provided only vague or incomplete online guidance regarding the application 0 process, leaving families uncertain about timelines, document requirements, and how to link their applications to a G-code.
 - The eligibility criteria (such as the requirement to have been physically present in Gaza 0 since October 7) were not clearly explained or consistently applied, causing distress and confusion among applicants.
 - Families reported receiving contradictory information from officials for example, some were told they could link their TRV application to a G-code, while others were told this was not possible after submission.
 - IRCC and CBSA failed to proactively inform families about essential steps, such as needing to apply for a visitor record or work/study permit upon arrival, leaving new arrivals without legal status or access to services like health care.
 - There were cases of families arriving in Canada and being threatened with deportation by CBSA officers, who claimed they had no documentation or were unaware of the Gaza special measures, despite anchors having communicated clearly with IRCC.
 - Applicants were often unable to reach IRCC or CBSA for clarification, and when they did, the guidance provided often conflicted with previous information.













Systemic Discrimination and Failure of Gendered Obligations

- Human rights and advocacy organizations have raised alarms that the program reflects systemic ٠ anti-Palestinian racism, including:
 - Disproportionately strict security screening compared to programs for other conflictaffected populations;
 - Lack of consistency with Canada's humanitarian response to other crises (e.g., Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, etc.).
- Furthermore, these requirements placed a disproportionate burden on women, who are often • tasked with navigating applications on behalf of children, elders, or injured relatives, while also ignoring how conflict systemically strips individuals of individuals and proof of relationships, particularly those already marginalized.
- Such requirements directly contradict Canada's commitment to its widely referenced 'feminist • foreign policy,' its Gender-Based Analysis Plus Commitments and its obligations under the Women Peace and Security Agenda. These commitments, at bare minimum, require a gendersensitive conflict response, actioning 'do no harm" humanitarian standards, and genderresponsive and gender-conscious policy implementation. These require the examination, consideration and accommodation of varying vulnerabilities. Instead the Government of Canada has proceeded with the exact opposite, compromising the lives of the most vulnerable and marginalized civilian population in the world.

Lack of Diplomatic Effort and Inaction

- The Canadian government failed to take proactive diplomatic steps with Israel and Egypt to • secure safe passage for TRV applicants and their families. To date, there is no evidence that the government shared complete lists of approved applicants with either country, even after applicants underwent an extensive and often invasive application and approval process.
- Despite issuing visas, Canada did not ensure applicants could actually leave Gaza or cross borders, leaving them trapped in life-threatening conditions.
- Many families waited for months with no updates, stranded amid ongoing Israeli bombardment in • Gaza or in temporary shelters in Egypt, with no clarity on next steps.
- This inaction and delay undermined the program's stated humanitarian purpose and left thousands at risk despite having qualified for relief.













TIMELINE OF PROGRAM FAILURES

- December 2023 Government announces intent to reunite 1,000 family members of Palestinian • Canadians.
- January 2024 Program officially opens. Immediate concerns are raised by civil society about • inaccessibility and discriminatory implementation.
- Spring 2024 Only a handful of arrivals are confirmed. Government withholds data on program effectiveness, while advocacy intensifies.
- Summer 2024 Legal action is launched, including lawsuits alleging anti-Palestinian racism and failure to uphold Charter rights.
- Fall 2024 Program expands to 5,000 applicants but remains plagued by processing delays and diplomatic inaction. The government announces that intake has closed in March 2025.

HUMAN IMPACT

- Families remain painfully separated, with many loved ones trapped in Gaza under relentless bombardment or stranded in Egypt, often in overcrowded or unsafe conditions, while awaiting word on their TRV status.
- Children, pregnant women, and the elderly are among the most vulnerable. Many children are • living without one or both parents, enduring trauma without proper psychological support. Elderly applicants—many with medical conditions or mobility challenges—have been left in war zones or border regions without adequate care.
- At the start of Israel's genocidal assault, approximately 50% of Gaza's population were children, • with the average age around 5 years old. This demographic reality magnifies the scale of devastation, as the majority of those trapped, injured, or killed are among the youngest and most defenseless.
- Access to basic necessities such as food, clean water, shelter, and healthcare is severely limited, • particularly in Gaza, where infrastructure has collapsed. Prolonged delays mean many are living in unsafe conditions, at high risk of disease, injury, and death.
- The psychological toll is profound. Families face daily anxiety over the safety of loved ones, • especially when communications are cut off. Many are grieving deaths that occurred while waiting for Canadian action that never came.
- Financial hardship is widespread. Applicants and their Canadian sponsors have depleted their • savings on legal fees, documentation, temporary lodging in Egypt, and other expenses-often without result. To make matters worse, the government has knowingly left families to navigate third-party militia networks, where bribes of \$10,000 or more per person are demanded for safe











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passage out of Gaza — a clear abdication of responsibility that has put lives at further risk and exploited families in crisis.

This prolonged uncertainty and lack of support have inflicted lasting emotional trauma and • economic instability, especially among racialized, refugee, and working-class communities already facing marginalization in Canada.

"These Kids Need Their Mom" — The Story of Doaa, Qasem, and Their Children

Fourteen-year-old Zahed, twelve-year-old Abdalrahman, and seven-year-old Joury survived 18 months of war in Gaza, only to be separated from their mother, Doaa, at the very moment they were finally offered a path to safety in Canada.

Their father, Qasem, an engineer, described the moment they received evacuation instructions from the Canadian embassy as a rare flicker of hope amid relentless trauma. That hope was quickly shattered when they discovered that Doaa's name was missing from the list of approved travelers. Despite completing her background verification and submitting marriage and travel documents, Doaa was excluded on a technicality related to biometric data - something the Canadian government explicitly acknowledged would be impossible to complete from within Gaza.

With bombs still falling, Qasem was forced to make an impossible choice: leave Doaa behind so their children could survive, or risk the entire family's safety by staying. "We made one of the most difficult decisions of our lives," Qasem said. "To leave her alone to face her fate and protect our children by traveling with me for their safety." The separation has devastated their children, who now live in Canada physically, but are emotionally paralyzed - unable to begin healing or imagine a future while consumed with fear for their mother's life.

This case illustrates the irreparable harm caused by Canada's shifting and inconsistent application process, which has forcibly torn families apart and violated the very principles of humanitarian response.

"I Begged Them to Let Him Come" — The Story of a Mother, a Disabled Son, and a Broken **System**

In one of the most heartbreaking examples shared by the Gazan Canadian League, a mother in Canada spent months trying to reunite with her disabled son, who was trapped in Gaza amid constant bombardment. She submitted all required documents, secured a G-code, and applied under the TRV program — yet her son was rejected without a clear explanation.

Despite repeated efforts to clarify his eligibility and provide updated medical records showing his urgent care needs, the family was met with silence and delays from IRCC. The mother described pleading with Canadian officials, telling them: "He cannot walk. He cannot survive this alone. Please — just let him come." She received no response.

Eventually, as bombardment intensified, she lost contact with her son entirely. She still does not know whether he is alive. "I begged them. I did everything right. And they just ignored me," she said at the May 22 press conference held by the League. "It feels like Canada signed his death sentence."













This case reflects how bureaucratic opacity and inaction have transformed an emergency relief program into a source of additional trauma. The Canadian government's failure to accommodate vulnerable individuals, especially those with disabilities, not only violates basic humanitarian principles — it puts lives at risk.

COMPARATIVE INJUSTICE

The Canadian government's response to the Ukrainian crisis saw over 900,000 applications approved under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) program, with nearly 300,000 Ukrainians arriving in Canada. In contrast, the Gaza TRV program has facilitated the arrival of only a few hundred individuals, highlighting a stark disparity in humanitarian response. This disparity is not accidental. It is evidence of systemic anti-Palestinian racism.

Program	Beneficiaries	Requirements	Outcome
Gaza TRV (2024)	1,000 family members of Palestinian Canadians (target)	Prove direct family ties, pay fees, undergo extensive checks, provide documents from a warzone, etc.	Dozens arrived at best; most left in limbo
Ukraine CUAET (2022–2024)	Over 185,000 Ukrainians	No family ties required, open work permits, free travel documents	Broad, fast-tracked access to Canada
Israeli TRV/Work- Study Visas (2024)	Approx. 10,000 Israelis	Normal processing, no humanitarian framing	No public outcry or scrutiny of security risks
Syrian Resettlement (2015)	25,000 refugees in 100 days	Mass mobilization with public support	Proved what's possible with political will

TALKING POINTS FOR ENGAGING CANDIDATES AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

Use these talking points in town halls, community meetings, or email/letter campaigns. Each one pairs a strong question with a rationale you can use to explain the issue or follow up.

Theme	Sample Talking Point / Question	Why It Matters (Rationale)
Broken Promise to Palestinian Canadians	"Canada promised to help reunite Palestinian Canadians with family trapped in Gaza. Less than 200 have made it out. Why has this promise not been fulfilled?"	This program was promoted as a lifeline. Instead, it's become a symbol of inaction and delay while lives remain at risk.











CANA DIANS



Discriminatory Double Standards	"Canada moved tens of thousands of Ukrainians to safety in weeks, with charter flights and open work permits. Why are Palestinians treated with suspicion and delays?"	Canada's unequal treatment reveals racial and political bias — Palestinians are being dehumanized by the very system meant to protect them.
Security Screening as a Barrier	"Why is every Palestinian applicant being treated as a security threat? Will you commit to reviewing the overreach of Canadian security agencies in this context?"	Palestinians are subjected to extraordinary vetting, often with no transparency or appeal — creating a discriminatory two-tier system.
Visa Rejections Without Reasons	"Will you push for an end to arbitrary visa refusals, and demand that IRCC provide reasons when rejecting TRVs for people in Gaza?"	Families are devastated by unexplained rejections. Fair process means knowing why a decision was made — especially in life-or-death cases.
Access to Safe Routes	"What will you do to ensure that people approved for TRVs can actually exit Gaza safely? Will you push Canada to negotiate safe passage with Israel and Egypt?"	Many applicants can't leave Gaza even with visas. Canada must use its diplomatic weight to ensure people can escape bombardment and siege.
Policy Reform Commitment	"Will you commit to fixing the Gaza TRV program, creating a clear humanitarian pathway, and ensuring IRCC decisions are subject to oversight and appeals?"	Piecemeal responses are not enough. Systemic reform is needed to ensure fairness, consistency, and protection rooted in rights.
Addressing Systemic Racism	"Will you speak publicly about the racism embedded in the Gaza TRV program and push for reforms across IRCC to prevent future discrimination?"	Anti-Palestinian racism isn't an accident — it's embedded in the decisions and priorities of our institutions. Reform must name it to fix it.
Data Transparency	"Will you demand the publication of disaggregated data on TRV approvals and denials for Gaza? The public deserves to see who's being denied protection."	Transparency is the first step toward accountability. Without data, we can't challenge systemic bias or understand the program's failures.













Supporting Survivors and Arrivals	"Will you advocate for wraparound services for Palestinian arrivals, including trauma recovery, housing support, and family sponsorship flexibility?"	Protection doesn't stop at the border. Survivors of war need comprehensive support — not bureaucratic neglect.
End Arms Transfers and Dual Policy Failures	"How can Canada claim to protect Palestinians while continuing arms exports to Israel? Will you support an arms embargo to end this contradiction?"	Canada's support for Israeli military action undermines its humanitarian commitments — both must be addressed together.
Condemning Political Interference	"Will you condemn political interference in immigration decision-making that prioritizes optics over urgent humanitarian need?"	Immigration responses should be rights-based, not driven by political calculation or foreign policy alliances.
Learning from Other Humanitarian Programs	"Will you push for lessons from past programs — like Afghanistan, Syria, and Ukraine — to be applied fairly to Palestinians?"	There are proven tools: chartered evacuations, temporary resident permits, special immigration classes. Palestinians deserve the same protection.
Long-Term Status Pathways	"Will you support permanent residence pathways for TRV holders and a special immigration class for Gaza?"	TRVs are a stopgap. A meaningful solution requires long-term stability and legal status for people fleeing war.

ACTION STEPS FOR THE PUBLIC

Raise Awareness

- Share information through social media, community events, and local media to highlight the • program's failures.
- Distribute this toolkit to friends, networks, and online platforms to encourage everyone to engage ٠ with candidates, and demand a better Canada.
- Uplift the stories of families affected by delays and denials personal stories are powerful tools ٠ for advocacy.













• Stay informed and mobilized through advocacy and human rights organizations active on this issue.

Contact Elected Officials

- **Call your MP's office** and ask to speak with them or leave a message. Clearly state that you are a constituent and explain why the TRV program urgently needs reform. Be specific: ask them to push for a full overhaul of the program, including pathways to permanent status, transparency on processing, and an end to discriminatory barriers.
- Write an email or letter to your MP. You can use the tool on the official Canadian Parliament website to quickly find and contact your representative. For guidance, refer to CMPAC's toolkit, which includes a sample letter: <u>CMPAC Toolkit for Engaging MPs on the Gaza TRV Reunification</u> <u>Program</u>.
- Bring up the issue when MPs visit your community raise it at town halls, local events, and during canvassing in this election cycle.
- Ask your MP to speak publicly about the failures of the program and to commit to addressing systemic anti-Palestinian racism in Canada's immigration and foreign policy.

Support Advocacy Groups

- Collaborate with organizations providing direct support, policy advocacy, and public pressure.
- Follow, support, and share the campaigns of organizations such as:
 - Gazan Canadian League
 - Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council (CMPAC)
 - Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME)
 - o Amnesty International Canada
- Join their calls to action: Send emails, sign petitions, and attend meetings or info sessions.
- Show up at vigils and public demonstrations. Talk to organizers on the ground and ask how you can help many local vigils are organized by people directly affected and are important spaces for solidarity and learning.
- Amplify their messaging online using your own voice especially if you have lived experience or personal connections to Gaza.













Organize or Attend a Candidate Town Hall

- Ask about the Gaza TRV program in public forums. •
- Hold candidates accountable don't allow them to ignore Palestinian families or evade responsibility.

Support Legal and Civil Society Campaigns

- Stay informed about ongoing legal challenges related to the program and share updates when • possible.
- Contribute to or fundraise for legal and advocacy organizations supporting Palestinian families and challenging discriminatory policy.

ADVOCACY DEMANDS

We call on all political parties and elected representatives to take immediate action to uphold the dignity, safety, and rights of Palestinian families by implementing the following:

- Reform and Relaunch the TRV Program with Integrity and Equity: The Gaza Family • Reunification program must not simply be reopened in its current broken form. It must be fundamentally reformed to address systemic flaws, eliminate arbitrary caps, and ensure transparent, accessible processes. Eligibility must be expanded to include more family members still trapped in Gaza, and the program must prioritize vulnerable individuals, including children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
- Simplify and Humanize Application Requirements: Eliminate onerous documentation • demands—such as full employment history since age 16 and proof of relationship under narrow legal definitions—that are nearly impossible to meet amid war and mass displacement.
- Expedite Immediate Processing and Prioritize Existing Applicants: Accelerate the • processing of current TRV holders and stranded applicants, prioritizing children, the elderly, and those with medical needs. Canada has demonstrated the ability to implement such measures swiftly, as seen in the responses to the crises in Syria and Ukraine, showing that effective action can be taken when the political will exists.
- Ensure Transparency and Accountability: Publicly release clear data on application numbers, • approvals, rejections, and timelines. Maintain open lines of communication with sponsors and applicants.
- Take Diplomatic Action for Safe Passage: Canada claims Israel as an ally and has direct • access to officials who can facilitate safe and timely evacuation routes for TRV holders and their families. It is crucial that Canada uses this influence to engage robustly with both Israel and Egypt, ensuring that these routes are guaranteed without further delay.













- Establish a Permanent Humanitarian Pathway: Create a long-term immigration stream for Palestinian families affected by conflict and displacement, including a pathway to permanent residency.
- Address Systemic Anti-Palestinian Racism in Immigration Policy: Commit to equity by reviewing and reforming policies that disproportionately burden or exclude Palestinian applicants, ensuring they receive the same urgency, dignity, and protection afforded to other refugee and humanitarian groups. This includes aligning with Canada's commitments under GBA+ (Gender-Based Analysis Plus) and its feminist foreign policy, ensuring that the unique needs of Palestinian families, particularly women and children, are addressed with the same attention and urgency as other vulnerable groups.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- CMPAC Toolkit for Engaging MPs on the Gaza TRV Reunification Program
- <u>CJPME's Full Report on the Gaza TRV Program</u>
- Amnesty International: Urgent Changes Needed for Canada's TRV Program for Gazans
- Canada.ca: Crisis in Gaza Special Measures for Extended Family
- Reuters: Long Waits for Canadian Visas Leave Gazans in Limbo
- Use updates from the <u>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)</u> on the latest humanitarian impacts and statistics in Gaza, including infrastructure damage, displacement, and casualty number
- <u>Updates directly from Gazan Canadians</u> on their experiences and ongoing advocacy efforts

FINAL WORDS

Palestinian lives matter. Family reunification is a right, not a privilege. Canada cannot claim to support humanitarian values while upholding systems of exclusion, racism, and discrimination. We cannot accept a hierarchy of rights in this country — all families deserve safety, dignity, and the chance to be together. This election is your moment to make noise, demand action, and hold power to account. Together, we can change the story.