



No interest* until 201
with equal payments and minimum purchase of \$999 on TVs and home th

[Click for details ▶](#)

[the star.com](#)

Canada votes alone for Israel

We're the only one of 47 nations on UN rights panel to refuse to condemn military offensive in Gaza

January 13, 2009

**BRUCE CAMPION-SMITH
LES WHITTINGTON**
OTTAWA BUREAU

OTTAWA—Canada stood alone before a United Nations human rights council yesterday, the only one among 47 nations to oppose a motion condemning the Israeli military offensive in Gaza.

The vote before the Geneva-based body shows the Stephen Harper government has abandoned a more even-handed approach to the Middle East in favour of unalloyed support of Israel, according to some long-time observers.

Thirty-three countries voted for the strongly worded motion, which called for an investigation into "grave" human rights violations by Israeli forces, while 13 nations, mostly European, abstained.

The United States, regarded as Israel's greatest ally, is not a member of the council.

Marius Grinius, Canada's representative on the council, said the language of the motion, which accused Israel of sparking a humanitarian crisis, was "unnecessary, unhelpful and inflammatory."

He said the text failed to "clearly recognize" that Hamas rocket attacks on Israel triggered the crisis.

But observers say Ottawa's unwavering support of Israel in the current conflict – highlighted by yesterday's vote – is a break from more neutral positions of the past.

Paul Heinbecker, a former Canadian ambassador to the UN, said that, although Canada was always considered "a friend of Israel," until recently Ottawa's representatives at the UN voted on Middle East issues on the basis of "principle" and "fair-mindedness."

Of Canada's current approach, he said, "It's not a middle-of-the-road position. It is a frankly supportive position of Israel."

He said internationally Canada is increasingly seen as being on the

American-Israeli side on these issues. But assessing yesterday's vote at the UN's human rights council, Heinbecker pointed out "the resolution is unbalanced" in its repeated condemnations of Israel.

Along with Arab states, countries backing the resolution included Russia, China and Brazil. Among those abstaining were Britain, France, Japan and South Korea.

The council itself has faced accusations it is biased against Israel. The U.S., arguing the council's credibility has been undermined, has declined to be a member.

However, in this conflict, Heinbecker said the Canadian government has "not tried itself to introduce a lot of balance into its position" on the fighting in Gaza.

"There are now 900-plus (Palestinian) deaths, a large number of whom are civilian, who are the predictable victims of a military campaign in a densely populated space where the people can't flee because the borders are closed," he said. Thirteen Israelis have been killed.

Given Canada's past actions to expand protection of civilians in conflict zones, he would have expected Ottawa to put more stress on the "urgent" need for a ceasefire and a demand that both sides in Gaza respect international protections for non-combatants, Heinbecker said.

Harper made clear his strong support for Israel just months after he took office in 2006. That summer, he defended Israel's military incursion into Lebanon with a controversial comment that it was a "measured" response.

NDP MP Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre) criticized Ottawa's "muted" reaction to this latest offensive. He said Canada should be taking a "robust" role to deliver aid to civilians and monitor any ceasefire.

Instead, he said Canada is sitting on the "sideline," suggesting a pro-Israel viewpoint by the Conservative government was the reason for lack of outcry from Ottawa.

The Canadian Islamic Congress yesterday called on the federal government to act as a peace broker and "lead the world as it used to.

"It's not time that we speak on who is right and who is wrong. I think it is time that innocent people in Gaza and Israel be protected," Zijad Delic, the congress's national executive director of the congress said.

"I worry that Canada did not take a fair approach," he said.

The government's vote won praise from B'nai Brith Canada, which commended Harper for Ottawa's "principled stand."

Frank Dimant, the group's executive vice-president, called the motion "perverse" for failing to mention Hamas and its "pivotal" role in provoking the conflict.

Last night, the foreign affairs department said Canada had opposed a "deeply flawed" resolution.

"The resolution wholly failed to acknowledge Hamas's continual rocket attacks on Israel that brought about the current crisis, and ignored a state's legitimate right to self-defence," a spokesperson said in an email.

"Canada remains deeply concerned about the ongoing hostilities ... and encourages all diplomatic efforts to achieve an immediate, sustainable and durable ceasefire. But first and foremost, Hamas's rocket attacks must stop so that a ceasefire can be realized."