

To Professor Angela Hildyard
Vice-President, Human Resources & Equity
Provost's Office
University of Toronto

Toronto, October 28, 2014

We are writing to you as concerned UofT faculty members who attended the Graduate Student Union's event "Divest from Israel's War Crimes" at the OISE auditorium last night. The event fielded four academic speakers, two graduate students and two professors who talked about the meaning of the Palestinian campaign to call on universities to boycott, divest from and sanction the state of Israel.

We are appalled by the violent disruptions that occurred during the second speaker's presentation. An organized group external to our university and identified as members of the "Jewish Defence League" continued to shout and make threatening noises even after the organizing students, the marshals and campus police asked them to leave. They persisted in insulting members of the audience including many of our colleagues. We were asked to leave the auditorium by campus police and readily complied. The violent disruptors, however, refused to leave, causing us to wait in the OISE lobby for an hour.

We are dismayed that campus police cancelled the event and tried to usher us out of the building, threatening us with consequences should we disobey. Moreover, we witnessed a disconcerting level of familiarity between campus police and the disruptors.

Furthermore, we are deeply troubled by the process by which this cancellation took place: the police cited "university policy" to those of us who questioned the legal and ethical basis of disbanding this event. But by cancelling this event campus police has, in fact, completed the work of the disruptors. This cannot be our university's policy.

We are alarmed that the order to cancel this student event came from your office. This constitutes a dangerous precedent on UofT campus for closing down topical, if controversial, debate. It also signals our university's acquiescence to violent intruders on our campus, and it threatens our academic mission of open and critical inquiry.

The cancellation of this event constitutes a serious breach in our confidence in our administration to safeguard the principles of academic freedom, freedom of speech, and university autonomy.

We, therefore, request that you ensure that the responsible individuals, and the group they belong to, are banned from campus henceforth.

We demand that you provide protection to faculty, staff and students from aggressive and intimidating acts like the ones we experienced last night.

We expect that you investigate the officers on duty last night, ascertain their competence and impartiality, as well as their ability to protect the university.

We also call upon you to affirm, unequivocally, the right to academic freedom, freedom of speech and our university's commitment to providing a safe space for the expression of critical thought on contemporary issues.

Present at the event:

Prof. Jens Hanssen

Prof. Shahrzad Mojab

Prof. Em. Chandler Davis

Prof. Em. Roger Beck

Prof. Alejandro Paz

Dr. Rand Askalan

Dr. Regis Pomes

Prof. Jamie Magnusson

Prof. Manal Hamzeh

Prof. Heather Sykes

Blair Kuntz, Librarian

Prof. Rania Salem

Prof. Jeannie Miller

Supporting signatures by concerned faculty:

Rinaldo Walcott (SESE), Dina Georgis (WGSJ), Muhammad Fadel (Law), Katherine Blouin (Classical Studies), Alissa Trotz (Caribbean Studies, WGSJ), Frank Cody, (Asian Institute), Aziza Chaouni (Architecture), Linda Northrup (NMC), Sara Salih (English), Amir Hassanpour (NMC, ret.), Donna Young (Anthropology), Rima Berns-McGown (UTM), Paul Kingston (Political Science), Bhavani Raman (History), Girish Dawani (Anthropology), Paul Hamel (Medicine), Malavika Kasturi (History), Natalie Rothman (History), Judy Deutsch (Psychology)