

June 2, 2020

Office of the President

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Dear friends and colleagues;

The events of November 20th, 2019, were deeply upsetting to the York University community. We are an institution that embraces diversity and inclusion alongside a commitment to rigorous scholarly inquiry and robust debate on controversial issues. The behaviour on display in Vari Hall on November 20th fell well short of our shared values and responsibilities. Many of you, from within and beyond the York community, have written to me to express your concerns. Please know that I share your disappointment. But in the weeks and months since the incident in question, I am proud of the way York has undergone a thorough review of the relevant policies, processes and community standards to ensure a safe and respectful environment where everyone is free to share their views.

The report before you is the result of this comprehensive review. The recommendations of our Internal Working Group, based on the findings of an external review conducted by former Supreme Court Justice Thomas Cromwell, are the result of months of careful work. The University accepts all of the recommendations put forward, and will immediately begin implementing them. We remain committed to our principles of protecting the safety of our community while respecting the free exchange of ideas. I am grateful to Justice Cromwell and our Internal Working Group for their excellent counsel, which together provide a roadmap for fulfilling our guiding values.

I want to speak directly to the Jewish community for a moment. We have heard your serious concerns and know that we have work to do. Anti-Semitism is a global problem that requires the urgent attention of our political leaders, educational institutions and civil society. York is not immune from anti-Semitism, nor are we unique in grappling with its manifestations within our community. The University has been clear: we condemn anti-Semitism in all its forms, just as we condemn Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, anti-Asian racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and any discrimination and hate based on national origin, race, religion, creed, ability, gender, or sexual orientation. We cannot police the beliefs of our community members, but we can strengthen our policies and procedures to protect our community from abhorrent views and actions. We also have an important role to play in addressing discrimination through research and education. Many of you have reached out to me with offers of educational resources to help build more respectful campus dialogue, and education is a welcome and essential focus of Justice



Cromwell and our Internal Working Group's recommendations. I look forward to deepening our engagement with all of the communities we serve and building a reciprocal and productive relationship where cultural exchange and learning flourishes.

The release of both reports is another step in an ongoing journey towards a more respectful and productive campus dialogue. The task before us now is to implement the thoughtful recommendations of Justice Cromwell and our Internal Working Group through determined community action. Our Internal Working Group will provide regular updates on the implementation process, and I will make this information available to our community. Through this work, we will fulfil our goal of creating a diverse and inclusive intellectual space where free expression and respect are inseparable. If there is a potential positive outcome to the shameful events of November 20th, I hope it will be that our community becomes an example of how deeply held beliefs on controversial issues can become vehicles for greater understanding, rather than sources of conflict.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rhonda L. Lenton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "L".

Rhonda L. Lenton, PhD
President and Vice-Chancellor