

January 19, 2024

Office of the President

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Dear Members of Parliament Housefather, Lametti, Mendicino, Gainey and Carr,

Thank you for reaching out and sharing your concerns about the increase in antisemitism across Canada since the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel.

The University quickly and unequivocally condemned that attack and took swift action to further enhance the safety of our campus community. I want to ensure that you are aware of [the statements](#) made by York in October and November 2023, including the related actions and safety measures we have implemented.

Much of the information in the responses below is captured in York's statements at the above link. We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the important questions shared by you and your colleagues.

Question 1: Is a call for genocide against the Jewish people, or the elimination of the State of Israel, a violation of your university's code of conduct?

Promoting genocide against any identifiable group is a crime under Canadian and international law. And yes, a call for genocide against the Jewish people whether in Israel or in the diaspora would also be a violation of York's [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#). Our Code provides that, at York University there is a responsibility to behave in a way that does not harm or threaten to harm another person's physical or mental wellbeing and the responsibility to uphold an atmosphere of civility, honesty, equity, and respect for others, thereby valuing the inherent diversity in the University community. See also our education to our community on free speech at York which describes the reasonable limits on free speech applicable to the York campus environment: https://www.yorku.ca/president/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2024/01/FAQ_re_Statement_of_Policy_on_Free_Speech.pdf

Question 2: What additional steps have you taken to protect Jewish students on your campus since October 7?

York takes matters of antisemitism very seriously. Antisemitism is included in our [Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#). We spent two years conducting broad consultations to develop and implement the [President's Initiative on Open and Respectful Dialogue](#) to address all forms of discrimination and racism including antisemitism.

At York, the Israel and Golda Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies is Canada's first interdisciplinary research centre in Jewish Studies and brings together a vibrant community of scholars and teachers to promote cutting-edge research in the field, establishing the Centre as a leading research institute on issues facing Jews in Canada.



Also, faculty members at York are taking proactive action to enhance education as a tool for building understanding among students with different backgrounds and beliefs.

In the days after October 7, 2023, the University proactively took a number of steps to strengthen [security and safety measures](#) on our campuses and [well-being resources](#). The enhanced safety and security measures were shared widely with community members here: <https://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2023/10/14/a-message-for-the-york-community/>

Further, we have established a University coordinating committee on antisemitism, and are currently in discussion with Muslim and Islamic Studies colleagues about possible facilitating mechanisms for work on Islamophobia. The senior administration has been meeting regularly with a number of recognized student groups to discuss the current experiences and challenges for Jewish, Israeli, Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab students and how the University can best support all of our students at this time.

Question 3: Will you commit to review your existing code of conduct to ensure that proper policies are in place to deal with antisemitism on campus?

Yes. York is committed to ensuring an inclusive campus environment for our students, faculty, staff, and visitors. York completed a full review of our existing Code in 2021 and our policies require regular review. York is committed to reviewing our existing Code to ensure that proper mechanisms are always in place to deal with antisemitism on our campuses as well as Islamophobia and all other forms of discrimination and hate.

Question 4: Will you commit to ensure that student associations, school newspapers and groups recognized by the university have proper measures in place to prevent them from becoming hostile environments for your Jewish students?

Yes. The [Regulation Regarding Student Organizations](#) ensures that all student organizations have proper measures in place to prevent them from becoming hostile environments for our Jewish students. The Regulation requires student organizations to conduct their activities in an open, accessible, democratic, and non-discriminatory manner (as described in Schedule D to the Regulation). Furthermore, the Regulation requires student organizations to have accessible internal processes to address complaints about any aspect of the organization and its activities. There are procedures for the University to address non-compliance with the Regulation and, if necessary, to impose sanctions.

The University has invoked the formal process under the Regulation with respect to three student associations for a public statement they issued on October 12, 2023 regarding the October 7, 2023 attack: [Community update: York's response to three student unions' harmful statement](#).

Question 5: Will you be taking steps to also ensure that your Jewish faculty members and staff feel safe on campus?

Yes. We have taken such steps and will continue to do so.

In addition to the proactive measures described above in response to question 2, York provides supports to faculty and instructors through our Teaching Commons resources to help to navigate challenging conversations or conflict in classroom environments.

Also, we have established a program of “drop-in” sessions for University staff with a view to providing support to all those experiencing stress related to the October 7, 2023 events and their aftermath. We also provide a full suite of [well-being supports](#) to all York employees.

I am devastated by the loss of life of civilians in Israel and Gaza and the escalation of violence in the region that puts many more lives at risk – including those of friends, family, and respected colleagues.

Know that we take our responsibility to ensure a safe and inclusive campus experience for all very seriously.

Sincerely,

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

Rhonda Lenton, PhD
President and Vice-Chancellor