



February 23, 2024

Shafqat Ali, MP Brampton Centre  
Chandra Arya, MP Nepean  
Paul Chiang, MP Markham-Unionville  
Hon. Lena Metlege Diab, KC, MP Halifax West  
Elizabeth May, MP Saanich-Gulf Islands  
Ken McDonald, MP Avalon  
Mike Morrice, MP Kitchener Centre  
Yasir Naqvi, MP Ottawa Centre  
Sonia Sidhu, MP Brampton South  
Tony Van Bynen, MP Newmarket-Aurora  
Patrick Weiler, MP West Vancouver-Sunshine Coast-Sea to Sky Country  
Salma Zahid, MP Scarborough Centre  
Sameer Zuberi, MP Pierrefonds-Dollard

Dear Members of the House of Commons:

Thank you for your letter of February 4. This continues to be a troubling and difficult time for many in our community – including those who have experienced personal loss or are deeply worried for the well-being of their loved ones as well as those who are emotionally affected by the conflict and are struggling to comprehend the suffering.

Against this stark reality, it is especially painful to know that incidents of Islamophobia, antisemitism, and anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab discrimination are on the rise in Canada, as your letter underscores. These abhorrent forms of discrimination contravene the University of Toronto's values, policies and our institutional commitment to foundational human rights. We recognize the harm these forms of discrimination cause; we condemn them unequivocally; and we are taking strong action against them.

Our efforts to combat antisemitism have been outlined in our response to a letter that was received from your fellow Members of the House of Commons. Our work to **combat Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab discrimination** is comprehensive and has expanded since October. A few highlights include:

- In 2017/18, an institutional advisory table was created to discuss issues of Islamophobia impacting our community. This group evolved in 2019/20 to become the Anti-Islamophobia Working Group, focusing on the diverse interests of Muslim communities and advancing dialogue and learning. Their current efforts include an expanded focus on anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian discrimination.

- Our Anti-Racism & Cultural Diversity Office (ARCDO) has held 14 workshops in the last five years on Islamophobia, addressing topics such as “More than One Experience: Encountering Islamophobia”, and “Moving Forward: Addressing Islamophobia and Fostering Allyship on Campus”. As a result, over 700 members of our community have engaged in education and discussion on Islamophobia and strategies to increase inclusion.
- The University’s first-ever Assistant Director, Faith and Anti-Racism began her work in January 2024 with a mandate to improve our processes for responding to reports of racism or faith-based discrimination, and to foster dialogue, mutual understanding and respect.

To complement this work, we are **enabling our community to exchange ideas and engage in debate thoughtfully and safely**, and **supporting those who feel uncomfortable**. Recent efforts include the following:

- Professor Randy Boyagoda has been appointed as our first-ever Provostial Adviser on Civil Discourse to cultivate people’s capacity and disposition to recognize, respect and reconcile differences while working toward shared understanding in pursuit of truth and for the greater good. These efforts will be supported by a working group of students and faculty, and will take the form of public events, research opportunities and programming in and beyond the classroom to develop and sustain civil discourse at our University.
- We are helping leaders across the University understand the limits of freedom of speech, the identification of hate speech as set forth in Canadian jurisprudence and our collective obligations under government statutes and regulation as well as University codes and policies. We also work with individuals to help them understand their responsibility to balance the expression of their beliefs with any duties they may have under various standards of professional behaviour from licensing bodies.
- In several cases, faculty members have posted content on their social media accounts that led to complaints about Islamophobia. In each case, an academic administrator had a conversation with the individual to raise awareness about the impact of the faculty member’s online expression and encourage more productive and respectful dialogue.
- We have rigorous practices and guidelines to protect the privacy of personal information about individuals that is held by the University. We also offer a resource guide that helps students protect their personal reputations by understanding “doxxing” and adjusting their social media settings and practices.
- We have mechanisms in place for students and for faculty, staff and librarians to seek consultation, support or resolution related to incivility, harassment or discrimination of any kind.

Your letter rightfully acknowledges other fundamental rights that are critical to a flourishing democratic society: **freedoms of speech, association and assembly**. As you will see in the examples provided below, these rights co-exist at the University of Toronto with our **commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression** and our ongoing work to create an **environment of tolerance and respect** where the widest possible array of perspectives can be debated constructively, **without undue influence**:

- Our Statement on Freedom of Speech was established in 1992 and has protected free speech while providing a principled approach to managing disagreements. We publish and archive our annual Freedom of Speech Reports where they are available to the public. All policies on freedom of speech can be found here.

- The University of Toronto allows for peaceful protest and assembly. We routinely connect student groups and student leaders to campus safety resources to help organizers host events that protect participants' safety.
- In cases where students and faculty may be taking on academic work on controversial topics including the current global conflict, we have arranged individualized personal safety planning consultations with our Community Safety Office.
- Other institutional policies balance freedom of speech with safeguards against physical intimidation and harassment. These standards allow the maximum opportunity for dissent and debate.
- The University has the most rigorous Guidelines on Donations among Canadian universities. They prohibit gifts that compromise our integrity, autonomy and academic freedom. The terms and conditions governing the use of donations are part of the public record. We do not accept gifts that involve unlawful discrimination on prohibited grounds.

As a learning institution, we are fundamentally committed to **working with student groups to foster open dialogue and gain insights into racism**. A few highlights of this work include:

- Our Vice-Provost, Students, the Principals of our campuses, and I have met with Jewish and Muslim student groups to hear their concerns and offer support.
- The Executive Director, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, and Assistant Director, Faith and Anti-Racism have launched a Community Check-In Series to engage faculties, departments, academic units, administrative offices and student groups to discuss how anti-Palestinian discrimination, Islamophobia and antisemitism are being experienced, and the resources and strategies available to support our communities.
- Our Vice-President, People Strategy, Equity and Culture and our Executive Director, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion routinely meet with faculty representatives of the Jewish community and the Palestinian community to discuss their experiences.
- Our Multifaith Centre offers a "Challenging antisemitism and Islamophobia" program consisting of workshops and events for students to further their understanding of these forms of discrimination and to learn how to address and challenge hate.

Finally, the University is **promoting peaceful solutions, constructive dialogue and conflict resolution** by focusing on our core mission of research and education. As home to leading scholarly experts, we are distinctly able to convene and host programming that deepens understanding. For instance:

- University of Toronto scholars have organized public lectures, seminars and discussions in Islamic Studies, Anthropology, History, Religion, Law, and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations.
- Our Institute of Islamic Studies produces academic research that examines global governance, regulations and policies through the Muslim experience, and integrates the lived experience of Canada's diverse Muslims to support democracy and inclusion. It hosts an archive that documents the experiences of Muslims in Canada, develops large-scale data sets that inform studies to improve the visibility of Muslims across Canada, and hosts a Structural Islamophobia Research Lab to examine structural Islamophobia enabled by all levels of government.
- Researchers at the University's Munk School of Global Affairs are part of a project to study the proliferation of hate narratives on social media and identify strategies to disrupt harmful conversations. Their focus is on both antisemitism and Islamophobia.

- The Munk School is also hosting online and in-person discussions to advance understanding of issues related to the conflict in the Middle East. The Ambassadors' Series features ambassadors and diplomatic representatives from the affected regions, the United Nations, Canada and the U.S. while the Speakers' Series features other diverse and credible experts.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the University of Toronto's steadfast opposition to Islamophobia, antisemitism, anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab discrimination, and likewise our commitment to providing an environment for study and work that is free of discrimination, hatred, intimidation and fear, for all members of our community. Our important work in this regard continues as we strive to address these pressing needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Meric S. Gertler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Meric" being the most prominent.

Meric S. Gertler  
President