

May 9, 2024

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights,

Re: Your Study of Antisemitism on University Campuses in Canada

I am writing to you as a frightened and concerned Canadian Jewish university student. My name is Sophie Kraft, and I just completed my third year of studies at McGill University, majoring in Art History and minoring in Management. I want to describe for you what it has meant to be a Jewish student on a Canadian university campus, and particularly on one such as McGill with its dramatic and overt rise in antisemitism.

McGill is notorious in its history for allowing offensive antisemitic rhetoric and actions on its campus. One needs only to read Bonnie Goodman's "A Constant Battle - McGill University's Complicated History with Antisemitism and Now Anti-Zionism" to fully understand the scope and depth of McGill's allowance of its students to be overtly antisemitic.

As someone deeply connected to my Jewish heritage, having attended Jewish schools, formed friendships within the Jewish community, and participated in Jewish cultural activities such as summer camp, my identity is strongly rooted in Judaism, and subsequently Zionism: Israel's right to exist as its Indigenous homeland. Anti-Zionism and antisemitism co-exist, and I firmly believe that these aspects are integral to my Jewish identity and should not, and will never, be separated.

I became actively involved in the McGill and Montreal Jewish community in January of 2024 through my role as VP Marketing at The Startup Nation McGill, a club dedicated to showcasing and bringing Israeli technology and innovation to campus. I am very proud of the milestone Startup Nation McGill achieved: we are the first club in a decade to table with an Israeli flag on campus starting in January. Despite our efforts to foster unity and inclusivity, our initiatives have been met with hostility. We have been spat on and told we are disgusting. We organized a peaceful Bring Them Home rally on April 9th - where people laughed at us while we were silently holding up hostage posters. Our networking event on March 25th featuring technology, STEM, and businesses with Jewish or Israeli affiliations was successful, however, masked protestors attempted to enter the event space. While these initiatives aim to foster change on campus and create a more united, inclusive student body, they are met with extreme counter protests and antisemitic rhetoric.

In the aftermath of October 7th, 2023, the hostility towards Jewish students has been exponential and below are some specific examples of the hate, antisemitism, and intimidation that I have experienced.

- Support for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR) McGill conducted a "die-in" on March 28th, 2024, where they lay down on campus, pretending to be dead. They proceeded to take their protest to multiple campus buildings, disrupting classes, and blocked others from entering buildings. At this rally, an older man who is not a student held a sign that read: "On October 7th Israel killed its own people & covered it up to justify genocide."
- During my Fall 2023 Critical Theory class, my professor sent out an email on October 24th stating, "I have recently been informed that several student groups around town have organized a city-wide walkout on classes tomorrow at 1:30 in response to the ongoing siege on Gaza. In the spirit of the core themes of this course, I've decided to cancel tomorrow's class in solidarity with

this effort...hope to see some of you out there tomorrow.” I was horrified and sought support from Chabad on campus. With their assistance, the class was “uncancelled.”

- The same professor the following week, on October 30th, was teaching about trends in media and included a slide of a pro-Palestine rally. The professor used class time and his teaching tools to affirm his stance, allowing his personal advocacy to overtake his pedagogy.
- I went to the Office for Mediation and Reporting on Thursday, November 2nd to file a case against this professor. I was advised by the case manager that my case was not strong enough and that I should not bother to follow through because it will not make a change. This is one concrete example of how the McGill administration tried to silence my voice without attempting to ensure my safety and or wellbeing as a student on campus.
- In a conference, a McGill TA hired for a class called The Holocaust (JWST 240), told their students that “the Jews learned how to commit a genocide from Hitler,” and another McGill Political Science professor told their students that they would get extra credit if they attended one of these SPHR rallies, indirectly attempting to influence students.
- I am a VP External for the Art History and Communications Studies Student Association. On February 28, 2024, The Arts Undergraduate Society (AUS) held a meeting and the first item on the agenda was a motion for a “Comprehensive Academic Boycott Against Institutions Complicit in Settler-Colonialism.” It was passed unanimously, despite its inherent anti-Zionist rhetoric. I debated this motion alone in a room of 60 students in the AUS. Institutional actions, such as the passing of motions endorsing academic boycotts against Israel, perpetuate a skewed narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ignoring key facts and contributing to a hostile atmosphere for Jewish students. After the motion passed, I received a threatening email from a fellow student in my department that read: “I think you are doing a poor job as the VP external of art history. I have heard multiple accounts of you being outspokenly pro-Israel when it comes to discussing and voting on motions during VP external meetings.” The reason for me speaking up in a room of 60 people who are trying (and successfully did) pass inherently antisemitic motions is because I cannot sit silent anymore, yet when I utilize my right to free speech, I am threatened.

All of these instances made me very emotional, and compromised what should have been an enjoyable and successful academic year at McGill.

Repeated attempts to address these issues through the McGill administration have been met with apathy. The reluctance of the school to act and address incidents of antisemitism effectively silences student voices and fosters an environment of hate and fear. While assurances of support are given behind closed doors, tangible steps to combat antisemitism by McGill is lacking.

My university has failed me, as have many others across Canada for their Jewish and Israeli students. As leaders entrusted with ensuring a safe and inclusive country, I implore you to take decisive and **UNEQUIVOCAL** action to support Jewish and Israeli students. It becomes the responsibility of a governing body - whether that be student government, administration, or the Canadian government - for the antisemitism that comes out of these university spaces. Even if these governing bodies are not directly causing antisemitism, you are responsible for ending it in its tracks. As the leaders of our country, you claim responsibility for the hatred, denialism, and antisemitism that is rampant on university campuses across the country.

In response to this, I urge you to:

- Work closely with university administrators to immediately address instances of antisemitism and ensure that Jewish students feel safe and supported on campus, no different than any other minority group.
- Mandate the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) working definition of antisemitism to clearly define antisemitism.
- Provide resources and support for initiatives that promote interfaith dialogue and understanding. Not just allow the screaming and hateful chants from protestors under the guise of Free Speech. There is a fine line between free speech and hate speech, and we need to ensure that everyone who lives in this country is aware of those differences.
- Immediately begin an investigation into the sources of financial support for universities, their departmental programs and affiliations of professors and student unions. It has been very widely determined that funding sources are a root determination for the views held on campus the old adage applies here "he who pays the piper, calls the tune." If those funding sources are determined to be from any group or country that supports ideologies contrary to Canadian values, then they need to be terminated.
- Hold accountable those that support terror groups and spread terrorist ideologies and do not waiver in that endeavor.

It is imperative that we stand against hatred and discrimination. In order to be on the right side of history, it is up to you to see what is happening on campus for what it truly is. We are not living in 1933-1945 Europe, yet this is exactly how it started there. This is Canada - support Jewish students, unite against hatred and cultivate a community where all students, despite our differences, feel a sense of belonging.

Thank you,

Sophie Kraft

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SK' followed by a stylized flourish.