



Jean-François Lafleur,
Clerk of the committee
Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights
House of Commons
Parliament of Canada

May 26, 2024

Dear Jean-Francois Lafleur,

Re: The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights should recommend that post-secondary institutions should allow for rebuttal of antisemitic discourse emanating from their platforms

The valedictory [speech](#) of Gem Newman on May 16th, 2024 at the convocation of the Medical College of the University of Manitoba provides an illustration, showing why the implementation of such a recommendation would be useful. The typical valedictory speech reminds the students of their past years of study and welcomes them into the future for which their studies have prepared them. This valedictory address instead engaged in a one-sided diatribe.

The speech itself was short. Yet a text explaining everything that was wrong with it would be lengthy.

To take one example, in an excerpt from one sentence, the speaker asked the students in his audience "to stand in solidarity with Indigenous people everywhere ... in Palestine, where Israel's deliberate targeting of hospitals and other civilian infrastructure has led to more than 35,000 deaths and widespread famine and disease." This excerpt is rife with inaccuracies.

For one, Jews are indigenous to Israel, living there since pre-historic times, centuries before the advent of Islam, with a continuous presence to the current day. To suggest that solidarity with the indigenous somehow favours Palestinians is a denial of reality.

For another, the existence of Palestine as a state is not recognized by the Government of Canada and 46 other states. One could argue that Canada and other states should recognize Palestine. However, to assume that this recognition already exists is inaccurate.

Third, Israel has not deliberately targeted hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. What Israel has deliberately targeted is Hamas, because of its attack on Israel on October 7th, 2023, its murder of 1,139, its mass rapes during that attack and the kidnapping of over 240 hostages. The valedictory speech mentions none of this.

The reason that hospitals and other civilian infrastructure have suffered when Israel responded to the Hamas October 7th attack is entirely the fault of Hamas. At or near civilian infrastructures, Hamas stores and uses arms and rockets, runs command operations, mingles without uniforms with the civilian population, builds tunnels and tunnel entrances, uses civilians as human shields and threatens, exhorts and prevents civilians from fleeing when Israel [warns](#) of an impending attack, as Israel systematically does.

Fourth, the figure of more than 35,000 casualties the speaker mentioned is a Hamas

Health Ministry clumsily concocted statistical [fabrication](#). The casualty figures, whatever they are, includes thousands of Hamas operatives, a number of which Hamas gives no indication.

Fifth, food insecurity exists in Gaza because of Hamas. Hamas [diverts](#) food aid to stockpile in its tunnels for its [claimed plan](#) of a next attack against Israel and [to sell](#) at exorbitant prices at local markets in order to raise money to buy more arms. Hamas [threatens](#) and [kills](#) anyone who tries to distribute aid directly rather than through Hamas channels.

Well, that was just one part of one sentence in the valedictory address. There are many more sentences like that, stuffed with errors.

Aside from the specifics, there are two contextual factors which the speaker ignored. One is that Hamas is not just a local Israeli problem. It is emblematic of a global problem, terrorism euphemistically disguised as Islamic fundamentalism, although there is nothing Islamic about mass killing of innocents, sexual atrocities and kidnappings.

This problem is particularly acute in the Middle East. Israel, by combatting terrorism in Gaza, is doing a global service and a service in particular to those of its neighbours who have not already succumbed to the terrorist plague.

The second, linked, contextual factor is anti-Zionism, the refusal to accept the existence of a Jewish state. With destruction of the Jewish state the end goal, terrorism and delegitimization through demonization work hand in hand.

Demonization is directed not just against the Jewish state but also against the Jewish people everywhere as actual or presumed supporters of this supposedly demon state. The result is that, with the Gaza war, attacks on Jews worldwide, including Canada, are at record levels, not just in comparison to past attacks on Jews, but in comparison to attacks

on all other minority populations.

There is, regrettably, on social media an endless flow of ignorance, hate speech, misinformation and disinformation. The gullible repetition of terrorist antisemitic propaganda without fact checking has become commonplace. The valedictorian, by echoing the Hamas demonization of Israel, fuels their antisemitic narrative.

Yet a valedictorian is supposed to be a lead student in their graduating class, the best and the brightest. The abuse of that position as a platform for prejudice by the current Medical Faculty valedictorian is not just a personal failing; it bespeaks and reflects a general degradation of university education and public discourse.

Winnipeg Friends of Israel wrote to the Dean of the College of Medicine on May 21st asking the College to send by e-mail to all those who attended the convocation and to post on the College website a rebuttal that the Winnipeg Friends of Israel would provide. To date there has been no reply.

We look forward to your respond.

Sincerely,

David Matas and

Yolanda Papini-Pollock

This letter is supported by:



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