

The logo for StandWithUs Canada, featuring the text "StandWithUs" in white on a blue rectangular background, with "CANADA" in blue text below it.

StandWithUs

CANADA

SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABOUT THE RISE AND ESCALATION OF ANTISEMITISM ON CANADIAN UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

StandWithUs Canada is a non-partisan education organization that supports Israel and fights antisemitism. We have been monitoring the burgeoning increase in unchecked antisemitism across the country, witnessing it escalate consistently since October 7th, manifesting itself in physical and psychological threats to the Canadian-Jewish community, particularly on our university campuses.

Introduction

On October 7th, when the nationally designated terrorist group, Hamas, brutally attacked Israeli citizens and perpetrated some of the most heinous crimes in recent memory, Jewish and Israeli students were understandably shaken and afraid for their friends and families, the safety of their nation, and the future of the place they call home.

However, these very real fears were further exacerbated by the dramatic rise in antisemitism here in Canada, and the failure of Canadian leadership to protect these students from further agony. This failure has allowed for the proliferation of antisemitism within our institutions of higher learning.

Jewish and Israeli students in Canada currently find themselves the targets of increased hate, harassment, threats, and intimidation. These acts of aggression have been perpetrated by individuals who reject the Canadian values of coexistence, multiculturalism, and safety for all, and instead cloak their blatant Jew-hatred in the guise of “anti-Zionism,” denying the Jewish right to identity and existence under the pretense of legitimate protest and political opinion.

Jewish and Israeli students have not been the only ones to suffer. Any student who advocates for a reasoned dialogue that empathizes with their Jewish and Israeli peers, or attempts to exercise their right to freedom of expression and debate, faces intimidation and threats from activists and faculty who seek to stifle genuine dialogue and freedom of expression. These antagonists promote dehumanizing hate and vitriol while paradoxically exploiting the values of fair and free debate to shield themselves from accountability.

We have chosen to use the majority of our brief to share depositions from a pair of students that we feel best represent the experiences shared by Jewish and pro-Israel students across the country. We hope that by hearing firsthand accounts of antisemitism from students on campus – whether perpetrated by other students, faculty, or increasingly commonly, individuals who exploit these institutions and their current campus climates without any genuine ties – you will understand the grave nature of this situation. There is one critical truth to understand: if nothing is done to combat this, the hatred and violence towards Jewish and Israeli students will only grow, ultimately reaching irreversibly perilous levels.

Unchecked, these agendas will expand until calls for Jewish death become even less concealed, and the desire to exclude Jewish people from academia and public spaces will become unmistakably clear. Those who employ Jew-hating tactics, violate the Criminal Code of Canada, university policies, and the fundamental principles of Canadian life – safety and coexistence – will not stop with Jewish and Israeli Canadians or those who speak up now. They will continue to assault Canadian values, promote hate, desecrate property, and undermine the rule of law. This trend should concern all Canadians.

As a result, we have a number of recommendations that we urge you to adopt today. We hope that hearing from our students will convince you of the alarming rise in antisemitism and the urgent need for decisive action.

Recommendations:

1. Actively Enforce the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism:

Endorse and promote the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism to clearly identify and address antisemitic activities on university campuses.

2. Federal Funding for Education and Awareness:

Allocate federal funds to support nationwide educational programs and campaigns that raise awareness specifically about the type of antisemitism we're witnessing today on university campuses – masked as antizionism and falsely portrayed as mere exercises of freedom of expression.

3. Investigate and Ban Hate Groups:

Conduct comprehensive federal investigations into hate groups operating within or targeting university campuses. Ban identified hate groups and take legal action to prevent their activities, ensuring they cannot incite violence or spread harmful ideologies.

4. Policy Review and Reform:

Initiate a federal review of university policies on discrimination, harassment, and free speech. Collaborate with educational institutions to ensure these policies are effective in preventing antisemitic activities while safeguarding legitimate free speech and academic freedom, and that they are able to be enforced.

It's been hard to be a young adult who supports Israel's right to exist who is also trying to fulfill an academic role on campus. Truthfully, regardless of your opinion about Israel, just being Jewish has made life on campus extremely difficult.

Going to the library is now some sort of political advocacy mission where you cannot feel comfortable to forget about the conflict and focus on your studies. Gone are the days where a student could walk through campus without seeing slogans such as "if you support the IDF you are a terrorist," or the classics like "globalize the intifada" and "from the river to the sea.". Here are a few instances myself and my peers have experienced on our campus since October 7th:

- At an anti-Israel rally which featured plenty of antisemitic rhetoric, an executive of the Palestinian Culture Club spoke to gatherers at a large rally on our campus and publicly named three Jewish students, encouraging the crowd to lead a targeted attack against these students with the hopes that it would lead to their expulsion.
- I was on a run with a weighted vest on with a very small Israel flag attached and someone pulled over, began following me, and called me a genocide supporting terrorist.
- I walked into a club with a friend who had a Magen David necklace on. A group of students started antagonizing him, beginning with a comment they made about his "Jew Necklace."
- A group of girls who hosted a food drive for Israel who woke up in the middle of the night, not once, but TWICE, to rocks that were thrown through their windows.

Laura Barkel, Toronto Metropolitan University

At the first anti-Israel protest following October 7th, a fellow TMU student identified me as a Jew, grabbed my arm, yanked me back, and launched into an outburst of vile antisemitic slurs. He said to me, "It's too bad Hitler didn't finish his job, or you and your family would all be dead".

The week following , without any provocation, a woman approached me, spat in my face and yelled "Get out of here, you dirty Jew", wielded her book as a weapon, struck me on the cheek, and forcefully pushed me off the sidewalk.. When I reported the incident to security, they directed me to student support services. However, I never received any follow-up from them, and the individual responsible continued to be on our campus every day.

After speaking out, I became circulated online as the devil behind TMU's pro-Israel community. Online harassment from peers and classmates has become disturbingly common, with death threats, graphic images, and derogatory comments flooding my social media and email inboxes daily. And it's not just confined to the digital world. I've been followed and shouted at on campus and in my own neighbourhood on a daily basis. People often yell at me, calling me a "genocide supporter" and "the Zionist of TMU", with my photo being circulated online with photos of me, sometimes with my face circled, accompanied by captions like "Oh no, it's not the TMU Zionist again" and, more worryingly, "find the TMU Zionist" and "If I see this Zionist again, I am going to catch assault charges".

Despite contacting campus authorities for support multiple times, the response has been continuously disappointing. Instead of addressing the root causes of antisemitism and implementing concrete measures to combat it, I've been met with indifference and token gestures. The lack of adequate security measures and the reluctance to confront antisemitism head-on has left me questioning whether it's worth risking my safety to engage with a campus environment that fails to prioritize the well-being of all its students while also making me question if I am welcome there as a Jewish person, or if me being there as a Jewish individual is viewed as an open invitation to be attacked. It's concerning that we find ourselves meeting with police and law enforcement more frequently than with each other.

The recent escalation of threats and harassment has pushed me to the brink. Last week, I was approached off campus and followed by a man who identified me from social media through my recent activism fighting antisemitism. His aggressive behaviour left me feeling shaken and targeted. Later that day, I found out that he had been messaging me online for a couple of weeks, stalking me, and even reposting images of me that other students had shared. He had been studying me, knowing what I looked like and who my friends were, all because I am Jewish. It goes without saying that this has caused me great anxiety and distress - so much so that I have been afraid to leave my apartment and be alone in public.

This whole experience underscores the urgent need for action. Facing antisemitism on campus has deeply affected me, causing mental distress and souring my university experience. Being targeted and attacked for my identity has been incredibly traumatic, leading to dread and even a sense of hatred towards attending school - a place where I should feel safe and eager to be. The fear of being recognized and subjected to further hostility, coupled with nightmares and sleepless nights, has made each day and each outing, or encounter an ordeal. Antisemitism has not only marred my academic journey but also eroded my sense of security and belonging in the broader community of Toronto.