



**SUBMISSION TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS**

Study on Antisemitism

**Alliance Combatting Campus Antisemitism
(ALCA)**

I am a human rights lawyer and Equity Consultant. My entire professional career has been focused on fighting for equity, inclusion and the dignity of marginalized groups. My lived experience is that of a Black woman and I work primarily with and for the Black community on issues of anti-Black racism and discrimination. I am the former founding Executive Director of the Black Legal Action Centre and former Interim Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

I am often called upon to teach about the history of discrimination in Canada. Sadly, there is much to teach, including the history of Canada's maltreatment of Jews who wished to come to this country, and of Jews already here. In particular, I teach about Canada's shameful history of antisemitism and its rejection of Jewish refugees during the Holocaust, which resulted in fewer than 5,000 Jews being allowed entry to Canada. This is compared to 200,000 to the US and 70,000 to the UK.

I also teach about the signs on beaches in Toronto that said "No Dogs or Jews Allowed"; about the exclusion of Jews from residential areas; and about the 1945 Gallup Poll in which Canadians overwhelmingly stated their desire to reject Jewish refugees and immigrants, second only to the racist rejection of Japanese refugees and immigrants. This discrimination against Jews included quotas for Jews to participate in certain courses or degrees.

Too few people know about this history of discrimination and antisemitism in Canada. It is an extremely unfortunate part of Canada's history, which provides valuable lessons about current events. Regrettably, the currents of historical antisemitism continue to be evident in Canada today.

Antisemitism in Canada remains an extremely concerning issue that manifests in various forms. Incidents of antisemitic vandalism, harassment, and discrimination are reported across the country, targeting Jewish individuals, institutions, and communities and more recently (after October 7, 2023), specifically on university campuses. Jews are far and away the most frequent target of hate crimes in Canada today and incidents of hate crime against Jews have seen a massive increase since October 7th. It is inconceivable that after a terrorist attack that saw Jews murdered, raped, and butchered, hatred against Jews would grow, but this is the reality of what has occurred and a reflection of the state of antisemitism today.

This hatred towards Jewish people has deep historical roots that spans centuries and is intertwined with various cultural, religious, social, racial and economic factors. These acts of antisemitism often stem from age-old stereotypes, distorted religious ideology, conspiracy theories, and prejudice against Jews, which persist despite best efforts to combat them.

I am not, nor do I profess to be, an expert in Middle Eastern politics. I am an expert in human rights and human rights often engage complicated and difficult questions. It is not uncommon for the rights of one group to come into conflict with the rights of another. In my experience, the

resolution of competing rights requires civil discourse and a willingness to respect and listen to the other side.

Sadly, on university campuses across Canada (and elsewhere) there seems to be little room for civil discourse and a willingness to listen. The long and very complicated debate around the self-determination of two peoples who share one land has been erroneously distilled by protestors into simple positions: you are either a supporter of freedom or you are not. You are an oppressor or you are not. You are on the right side or you are not. And ultimately, you are a Zionist or you are not.

The issue is not so simple.

For many, Zionism is the legitimate right to self-determination of the Jewish people and the existence of a safe homeland. This is particularly relevant in light of the historical persecution of Jews (including many who had to flee countries surrounding Israel), and the murder of six million Jews during the Holocaust. The creation of the State of Israel, supported at the time by the United Nations, was the manifestation of that right to self-determination and the right to live in a safe homeland.

For many others, the creation of the State of Israel is the cause of the mass displacement and maltreatment of the Palestinian people, and the loss of their lands. For them, the conduct of the State of Israel since 1948 has been seen and experienced as discriminatory and oppressive.

This leaves us with fundamentally complex and difficult questions about how to reconcile these competing visions and views of history. For decades, experts have tried to reconcile these competing positions—to no avail. I certainly do not claim to know the answer.

What I do know is that the solution to these two positions—the rights of both peoples to peaceful self-determination cannot be to villainize all Jews, including Jewish students, and characterize them as violent oppressors. It cannot be to deem Jews as “colonialists” who are oppressing people of colour. It cannot be the preclusion of Jews, who have long faced pernicious discrimination themselves and have a proud history of allyship with marginalized communities, including the Black and LGBTQ2IAS+ communities, from spaces where they have historically been allies to so many in our respective fights for equality. Nor is the solution the characterization of all Zionists, without distinction, as oppressors.

However, in the current political climate, the line has been blurred between the legitimate criticism of Israeli state policies and antisemitic rhetoric (the assertion that Jews control the universities, media, banks, that Oct 7 was a Jewish hoax, that all Zionists are evil, etc.), which serves to stereotype and marginalize all Jewish people. This is what is happening on university campuses. The atrocities of Hamas, including the murder, rape and torture of women, children and babies is being ignored, as if it never happened. It is horrific in my opinion to characterize the Hamas attack of October 7 as a fight for freedom. It was and is not a fight for freedom. It was a terrorist attack by a group who seek to annihilate all Jewish people. The core meaning of Zionism

has been distorted and become the opposition to Jews generally and a resurgence of virulent antisemitism across university campuses. Protest chants of “From the river to the sea” or, “Go back to Europe” are simply about the eradication of Jews and the State of Israel.

This does not mean that the voices of those who support the human rights and right to self-determination of the Palestinians should not be heard. Nor does it mean that the anguish of those who are suffering and dying in Gaza should be ignored. Human rights and human decency demand they be heard. Nor does it mean that there are not valid criticisms of the State of Israel and her government. It is entirely legitimate, and indeed imperative, to demand that the Israeli government respect and ensure the human rights of the Palestinian people and protect the lives of innocent civilians.

Students should be allowed to protest on campus. Their freedom of expression is a critical human right. The right to free speech is a fundamental cornerstone of democratic societies and academic freedom. Universities should be bastions of debate, intellectual challenge, and allow for the exchange of diverse ideas. It is crucial to uphold this right for all students, including those who wish to protest issues with which they disagree (respecting which there is disagreement). However, freedom of expression must be balanced with the rights of others to be free from discrimination and harm. The right to free speech must be exercised in a manner that does not infringe upon the dignity, rights, and safety of others. I believe that this is possible, indeed critical, with a commitment to civil discourse, mutual respect and listening to one another—even where you vehemently disagree with one another

It is essential to differentiate between legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and actions and discriminatory attitudes toward all Jewish people and communities. **A principled and ethical human rights approach mandates this differentiation.** It is and should be possible to believe in Jewish self-determination, a Jewish state, and simultaneously be opposed to Israeli state policy and the deaths of innocent Palestinians. It is and should be possible to have civil discourse about the issue. It should especially be possible on a university campus.

I firmly believe that excluding any group from the protections guaranteed under domestic and international human rights law not only undermines the rights of that group, but also impedes the collective pursuit of equality for us all. Human rights are the cornerstone of a just and inclusive society, and they are founded on the principle that every individual, regardless of their background or identity, deserves equal protection and dignity under the law. When any group is excluded from these protections, it not only infringes upon their rights, but also erodes the foundation upon which our shared aspirations for equality and justice rest. By ensuring that all individuals are afforded the full range of human rights protections, we uphold the values of fairness, respect, and dignity for every member of our global community.

Ruth Goba