

Surveilled & Silenced: A Report on Palestine Solidarity at York University

**Race Equity Caucus
York University
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We dedicate this report to student organizers at York University and universities across this continent. Thank you for making sure Palestine is not erased from our campuses.

Disclaimer

The faculty-run survey we document in this report met with backlash as soon as it was circulated by the Race Equity Caucus. It was criticized for excluding anti-Semitism and for particularly seeking the perspectives of only those sharing solidarity with Palestine. We reiterate that the purpose of the survey was to document the challenges and difficulties faced by members of the York community when demonstrating their support and actively working for the Palestinian cause, as well as the experience of community members as they navigated the York University campus since October 2023.

We invite all those critical of the survey and this report to review the response released by the Race Equity Caucus on February 20 2024 (see [Appendix A](#)). You may also wish to read a letter from members of York University's Jewish Faculty Network (see [Appendix B](#)).

Key Terminologies

This report uses the following definition of anti-Palestinian racism:

Anti-Palestinian racism is defined as the beliefs, attitudes, actions, practices, and behaviours of individuals and institutions that devalue, minimize, and marginalize the full humanity and dignity of Palestinians. It is the systematic and structural denial of the Palestinian right to self-determination and national liberation, and the collective existence of the Palestinian people. Anti-Palestinian racism also includes censoring those standing in solidarity with Palestine and Palestinians.

Anti-Palestinian racism is closely related to **Islamophobia** and **anti-Arab racism** given that stereotypes against both Arabs and Muslims stem from orientalist thought ([Edward Said, 1978](#)) that continues to drive the West's so-called "war on terror."

Please consult the [resources section](#) in this report for further elaboration.

Executive Summary

Surveilled & Silenced documents the experience of faculty members, students, and staff who stand in solidarity with Palestine and Palestinians, including those actively engaged in Palestine solidarity work across the York University campus. Its findings draw from two surveys - one circulated by the Race Equity Caucus (REC) and the second carried out by the Palestine Solidarity Collective (PSC), respectively (see [‘The Surveys & Design’](#) for details on these two collectives and their role and function within York University). The surveys invited York University faculty, students, and staff to share any experiences of being made to feel unsafe, silenced, intimidated and/or alienated in the wake of the events following October 7. Collectively, the surveys received 90 responses. Key findings are organized along the following four themes:

- **Silence and Inaction from York University Administration**
Respondents expressed concern with York University’s silence on the violent aggression and humanitarian catastrophe faced by Palestinians, and a troubling degree of silencing in their Palestine solidarity work on campus. They shared concerns about a climate of political repression that resonated with the university’s history of suppressing Palestine solidarity. The administration’s lack of concrete and meaningful response to growing hostilities such as doxxing of Palestine solidarity activists, the deployment of censorship tactics in classrooms, and overtly racist slurs and threats to physical violence on campus was also reported with concern.
- **‘Community Safety’? The Rhetoric of Repression**
Respondents shared concerns that ‘community safety’ was weaponized to sanction and suspend those in solidarity with Palestine. Some reported to be engaging in self-censorship due to fear of reprisal. Sanctions have led to financial and material consequences causing or aggravating precarious employment status and created distressful uncertainties about basic needs such as housing. These sanctions exacerbated existing structural vulnerabilities among the most precarious members of the York University community, with significant health and mental health consequences.

- From Hyper-surveillance of Palestine Solidarity Initiatives to Institutional and Everyday Policing of Palestinian Voices & Bodies on Campus**

Respondents shared information about the widespread policing and securitization of Palestine solidarity initiatives on campus. This led to the policing of Palestinian voices and bodies, and a deteriorating campus and classroom environment. Reports of anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia as being common occurrences on campus were shared and their manifestations, both directly and through subtle microaggressions, were extensively documented.
- Growing Distrust for the York University Administration**

Respondents raised concerns about the administration's partnerships and alliances with companies and institutions engaged in genocidal violence. Many are increasingly vocal about the need to divest from these corporations. Respondents articulated serious contradictions between the York University administration's official commitment to decolonization, equity, inclusivity, and diversity (DEDI) principles on one hand, and its complicity with the ongoing genocide of Palestinians. This was viewed as placing greater value in securing York's material, financial and political interests than the fundamental human rights for Palestinians, and students and community members standing up for Palestinian rights. Respondents reported that this gap has led to their growing sense of alienation from their work and study-places and led to a deterioration of relations on campus.

York University administration's management of Palestine solidarity actions on campus has [drawn attention](#) for its uniquely aggressive nature, particularly for having criminalized its own students for their explicit support for the Palestinian cause, and for having dismantled a student encampment for Palestine without seeking a court order. As is made evident by its current actions, the sentiments expressed by survey respondents, and in light of the historic realities documented in this report (see section entitled [York University: A Long and Troubling History of Academic Repression and Reprisal](#)), there is no doubt that York University administration has created a climate of hostility for Palestine solidarity actions for which it has taken no responsibility. The roots of this aggression, as we emphasize in our conclusion to this report, lie in the university's ideological and material investments in/with the Israeli state. To date, the university has shown no honest intention to make these relations public and/or to have collegial discussions about them. Divesting from these relations, as demanded by the student leadership of this university, will be key to starting the much-needed work of fostering a climate where politically vigorous, ethically responsible, and

compassionate conversations about Palestine, and justice for Palestinians, become possible, positively impacting teaching, research, and policies at York University.

We present this report to the York University administration on behalf of the Race Equity Caucus. We do so with acute awareness that these are times of great peril for academic freedom, indeed democratic freedom generally, and for Palestinian freedom specifically. Within the York University campus, however, it is the administration that is responsible for re-building the trust it has clearly lost. It is urgent that the administration actively works to mitigate the climate of fear, mistrust, hopelessness, and declining health and wellbeing that its actions and inactions have generated.

Introduction: Palestine, Campus Protests & York University

On Tuesday April 30 2024, seven months following the most recent escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict and subsequent Israeli bombardment in Gaza, York University administration sent a letter to all students. Signed by the Vice Provost of Students, the letter suggested that the Trespass to Property Act and general concerns about community safety do not allow sit-ins, occupations, and encampments on the university property ([Appendix C](#)).

In doing so, York University joined [a number of other institutions](#) which utilized similar language to dissuade Palestine solidarity activists from gathering on campus grounds. This was in response to the [400+ student demonstrations/encampments](#) that became active across campuses by the end of April 2024 in the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, across Europe, and elsewhere - which were calling for an end to the Israeli occupation of, and genocide in, Gaza; and for the divestment from weapons and other business ties that their universities had with Israel. Across North America and Europe, a number of university administrations sought [police assistance](#) to 'clear' demonstrators and the student encampments, with some [threatening to do so](#) with [serious consequences](#) for students and their allies. In response to this emerging situation, on May 7 2024, the Race Equity Caucus at York University released a statement that cautioned about the impact of repressive police actions on academic freedom and campus communities ([Appendix D](#)).

The encampment protests followed months-long organizing by students and faculty members across university campuses around the world in the form of demonstrations, teach-ins, popular media engagements and countless statements and petitions to stop the violence against Palestinians. The active crackdown on these democratic and peaceful protests comes in the wake of a near complete failure on the part of mainstream news and social media to create a common ground for engagement. Indeed, as William Shoki (2024) of *Africa is a Country* writes, zones of public conversations on critical issues of war and genocidal violence, including the violence unleashed on Palestinian journalists, have been "hermetically sealed"¹. The student encampments, as well, evoked highly polarised responses; celebrated on the one hand for following the [lineages](#)

¹ Shoki, W. (May 6, 2024). *Africa Is a Country Weekend Special, May 6: Who will fill the void?* Email newsletter.

of [anti-war](#) and [anti-apartheid protests](#), and [derided](#) as anti-Semitic, ‘anti-Israel protests’ and ‘woke terrorism’ on the [other](#).

The York University campus has been similarly polarised since October 7 2023. On the one hand, Palestine solidarity actions remain active on our campus with the ongoing goal of historicising the conflict for political education. Palestine solidarity actions on campus are staunch in their criticism of the State of Israel, push for nuanced conversations about the stakes involved in conflating critiques of Israel with anti-Semitism, and make increasingly powerful calls for divestment from the arms trade that supports Israel’s genocidal campaign. The Palestine solidarity actions on campus make the campus what it should be: **an educational and research site where complex conversations about affairs of global political significance can, and should, be had.**

However, on several occasions since October 7, faculty members and students experienced hostility and repression for their Palestine solidarity work, while teaching, learning, organizing protests, and/or engaging in conversations. These took the form of **overt condemnation and punishment of students and faculty members by the administration, surveillance of solidarity action events, and administrative inaction and/or inability for timely and robust responses to incidents of harassment and intimidation reported by students, faculty and staff.**

On June 6 2024, York University administration called on the [Toronto Police Service](#) to clear an encampment that was established by students less than 24 hours prior. This eviction came without a warning, and on the heels of a [public offer](#) by the administration to meet with student leaders to engage in dialogue. In contrast, the University of Toronto and McGill University sought court injunctions to deal with their own student encampments. To many in the York University community, this sudden repressive action - which subverted the stated need and want for dialogue - did not come as a surprise. We return to the encampment and further messages from the administration in response to this student protest, in our [concluding section](#).

We begin this report by documenting the history of academic repression and reprisal at York University as it relates to Palestine solidarity. In doing so, we call the administration’s attention to the fact that their long-standing and continuing actions and inactions have consequences that they should address with urgency. We then provide a timeline of developments at the York University campus since October 7 2023, followed by a presentation of our methodology for capturing the experiences of York University community members since then, which includes

two surveys, one administered by the Race Equity Caucus (REC) and another by the Palestine Solidarity Collective at York (PSC-York). The report concludes with a presentation of our findings and by charting out next steps which, we emphasize, should be in consultation and solidarity with our student leaders. Supporting documentation is included in a series of appendices.

York University: A Long and Troubling History of Academic Repression and Reprisal

Since 9/11, the York University administration has engaged in multiple attempts to silence Palestine solidarity on campus. The safety of Palestinian community members, and those in solidarity with Palestine, has been violated through reprisal and surveillance, leading to arrests in some instances, and a longstanding culture of fear on campus. It is [publicly known](#) that since 2004, the university has suspended a student without a hearing and banned him from campus for staging “unauthorized” protests supporting Palestine; [interfered with an international conference](#) about models of statehood for Israel and Palestine; [twice suspended](#) the official club status of Students Against Israeli Apartheid; made [statements](#) that contribute to the idea that Palestine solidarity activism is a form of hatred; and, declared that a [painting depicting Palestinian sumud](#) was “offensive” to the Jewish community. In addition, a number of [Decanal and Provostial trips to Israeli universities](#) have been brought to the attention of the university community, including a [trip to Israel](#) led by the Center for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA). These trips have taken place historically and after October 2023. When these realities are compounded with the fact that the university administration has failed to articulate any condemnation of the Palestinian genocide and the mass scale destruction of universities in Gaza, it is apparent that the university has taken a clear political position on the question of Palestine and Israel, while claiming impartiality.

Since October 2023, the administration has taken further and unprecedented steps to entrench a punitive and repressive culture around Palestinian solidarity actions on campus. A number of such incidents over the past few months created the backdrop for this report.

Events Since October 2023

On its [X social media account](#), York University posted the following message on October 8: “York denounces the weekend attacks against civilians in Israel and is deeply troubled by the ongoing violence. We have reached out directly to our students most impacted to offer support.” Subsequently, in their [October 10 message](#) to the York community, President Rhonda Lenton denounced the Hamas attack on Israeli civilians². The message anticipated “division and inflammatory language” and reminded the community that the [freedom of free expression and free association](#) are not absolute. In their [October 12 statement](#), the York Federation of Students (YFS), York University Graduate Students’ Association (YUGSA) and Glendon College Student Union (GCSU) expressed unwavering support for the people of Palestine who, the statement said, have been systematically displaced and living under genocidal violence of an occupying force since 1948.

The following day, October 13, York University administration released a [statement](#) condemning “the inflammatory statement shared by three student unions”, asking the said unions to “immediately clarify that they firmly reject any acts of violence or discrimination against Jewish students or other members of the community”. The clear identification of Jewish students without any reference to anti-Palestinian racism, and vague references to other students structured a climate of fear for academic freedom. Subsequent actions by the administration confirm a key finding of this report: that **academic freedom is limited, even non-existent when it comes to the question of Palestine.**

[YFS, YUGSA and GCSU](#) were strong in their rejection of this dangerous misinterpretation of Palestine solidarity as a call for violence:

[Our] statement has since been intentionally distorted by the media, members of the provincial government, and the York University administration, claiming that it promotes violence and discrimination. We categorically reject the claim that our statement in direct response to the dismantling of apartheid infrastructure promotes violence or hatred towards unarmed civilians; furthermore, we reject the intentional misinterpretation of our statement equating Palestinian

² It should be noted that some of those killed in Israel on October 7 2023 included other nationalities which rarely get mention, such as [Bedouins](#) and [Thai and Nepali migrant laborers](#).

sovereignty as a conduit for violence. The conflation of our support for Palestinian self-determination as condoning violence is deeply disturbing and rooted in racism.

On October 14, the administration used the newly drafted [Presidential Regulation 4](#) to interfere in the processes of autonomous student unions, demanding the resignation (pending breach proceedings) of democratically-elected York University Graduate Students Association (YUGSA), York Federation of Students (YFS), and Glendon Campus Student Union (GCSU) executives. Five executive members of YUGSA were suspended from their Teaching Assistantships and were banned from any contact with their students. Some members of the unions' executives eventually resigned due to intensity of the pressure and threats. At the time of writing, the university continues to withhold student levies under the threat of completely withdrawing recognition and funding to these student unions.

The [Race Equity Caucus statement](#) on the genocide in Palestine, co-signed by Glendon's Caucus d'équité raciale, strongly criticized this administrative conflation of the criticism of the Israeli state with anti-Semitism. The Department of Sociology released a statement on November 1 2023, condemning the administrative overreach into the functions of the autonomous student bodies (see [Appendix E](#)).

On October 16, senior members of York administration attended a [vigil organized by Hillel York](#). In [her remarks](#) during the event, President Lenton described how it is “difficult to navigate being the President of the university having family and friends in Israel” but assured attendees that the administration “will take very seriously all of your safety and wellbeing” and by “making sure that you all feel that you're represented”. There has been no such attendance by York administration at campus vigils against the ongoing genocide, or in solidarity with Palestinians.

On October 17, in a speech given at the Ontario legislature, [Jill Dunlop](#), Minister of Colleges and Universities named several York University professors as ‘celebrating’ terrorism. Given the ways in which public denouncements of Palestinian solidarity positions have contributed to aggressive doxxing in the [United States](#) and [Canada](#), Minister Dunlop's naming of people furthered the climate of fear, not only of repression of political and academic freedoms, but of physical, psychological harm, and loss of employment. A public response on behalf of the university to this naming and shaming strategy engaged with by Minister Dunlop, is still awaited. On October 25, the York University Faculty

Association (YUFA) endorsed the Canadian Association of University Teachers ([CAUT](#)) [statement](#) on the protection of academic freedom in times of conflict.

On November 10, a [group of 11 activists](#), including York University professor Lesley Wood, were accused of putting up posters against an Indigo bookstore in downtown Toronto, a company long associated with active support of the Israeli military. All activists were subsequently arrested in a pre-dawn raid of their homes and charged with ‘mischief’ and criminal harassment. York University administration suspended Professor Wood without following ‘due process’ - a legal requirement that carries presumption of innocence as a core value, and that requires substantive evidence before harsh disciplinary actions are taken.

Alarmed by the growing divide and the lack of places and possibilities for dialogue, many York University members took to educating themselves and their students. They organized teach-ins, vigils, solidarity marches and protests, and participated in non-violent actions, amongst other initiatives on campus (see [Figure 1](#), [Appendix F](#) and [Appendix G](#)).

In an effort to limit large gatherings of York community members, barriers were placed around key locations outside of Vari Hall, particularly around the fountain area ([Figure 2](#)).



Figure 1 Images of Palestine Solidarity initiatives at York University (Fall 2024)



Figure 2 Barriers placed on campus grounds by York University administration in an effort to limit large gatherings

On December 8 2023, the YUFA Executive Committee also endorsed a [statement passed by the Steward's Council](#) which pointed to the ways in which the university invoked 'community safety' as rationale for suspensions to create a discriminatory narrative. In addition, it pointed out that while the administration expressed concern about safety it simultaneously remained silent about the doxxing of faculty members:

We categorically reject the logic of community safety that serves as a rationale for the suspensions of our colleagues. Rather than a neutral position, the decision to suspend our colleagues based on unproven allegations actively contributes to the narrative that our colleagues present a danger and, therefore, must be separated from the institution in the name of safety. The University has, meanwhile, maintained silence as our colleagues have been doxed, including through mainstream media, a silence that violates its unique obligation to uphold, protect, and promote academic freedom.

A large gathering of faculty and students protesting the suspensions and the Toronto Police Services handling of the situation was held in Vari Hall on November 28 2023.

In December Faculty of Environment and Urban Change (EUC) students installed an art piece on the doors of GeoHub (see [Figure 3](#)). The installation condemned the business-as-usual stance of the administration and highlighted, through images, the impacts of an ongoing genocide on student communities. On being told to remove this installation, students put 'censored' over the term 'genocide' and the phrase 'from the river to the sea'. The installation was eventually removed entirely.

In December 2023, Liberal MP Anthony Housefather and four colleagues sent a letter to 27 Canadian universities, including York, asking them to articulate their efforts to protect Jewish students in the wake of rising anti-Semitism on campus. York University President Rhonda Lenton responded on [January 19 2024](#).

By the end of the Fall 2023 term, several units ([Appendix H](#)) had released statements sharing concerns about the York University administration's clear disregard of the genocide in Gaza, its erasure of the suffering of Palestinian peoples from various internal communications, and its frequent invocation of the opaque principle of community safety to destabilize political organizing by faculty, staff and students. Weekly peaceful student protests were highly securitized, often with dozens of York security personnel and the Toronto police present. Throughout the term, faculty members of the Race equity Caucus experienced, received and informally documented several reports of reprisals and harassments of themselves, staff and students. Internally, the caucus members started discussing the need for a survey that would capture these experiences. A committee was formed and started meeting in January 2024.

Meanwhile, in the last week of January 2024, CUPE - the union for part-time faculty, teaching assistants and graduate students - circulated a Palestine teach-in [toolkit](#) among its members. This was in response to a number [of Palestinian civilian-turned-journalists'](#) call to witness what was happening to Palestinians, particularly in Gaza. The toolkit challenged, what it called, York University's culture of 'repressive normalcy' and called on CUPE faculty and TAs to actively discuss and open space for discussing Palestine in classrooms, regardless of subject areas.



Figure 3 Before and After images of Faculty of Environment and Urban Change art installation which was censored and then removed (December 2024). Close-up of sections highlighted with yellow arrows also provided.

On January 30 2024, [President Lenton's response](#) to the toolkit was released. Students were encouraged to act as overseers in their tutorials and report on their Teaching Assistants' political speech. Further, in an egregious challenge to the principle of academic freedom and the time-honoured practice of ethically and politically grounded teaching, the statement chastised CUPE members for "diversion of their teaching from the planned curriculum," and from "the needs of the students and the legitimate claims of the community." Obfuscating the devastation of Palestinian land and peoples as 'war in the Middle East', the presidential statement committed to reaching out to Hillel as a recognized student organization supporting York's diverse community. No such offer was accorded to Palestinian students and/or student groups on campus.

On February 2 2024, Toronto Police Service was [called onto campus](#) for a lecture event on Palestine. As Dr. Muhannad Ayyash was getting ready to give a lecture entitled "The Palestinian Struggle for Liberation: Aspirations for a Decolonial Life" at an event sponsored by the Department of Anthropology, officers came into the room and informed the audience that they had been called there by the university given that there was a potentially dangerous 'major event' taking place on campus. Toronto Police Services on campus allegedly subverted York's own campus police procedures. Even after repeated attempts and calls by various units, faculty members and the Race Equity Caucus, the university administration offered neither a public explanation nor a public apology to the campus community or to Dr. Ayyash. Alarming, in a meeting with concerned faculty, the administration reported that the TPS was called by a 'special investigation unit' - making the fear of surveillance of academic work acute. It is not clear who alerted the university either. An investigation into this incident is still awaited.

On February 4 2024, [CUPE](#) released *a Fact Checker on the Toolkit for Teaching Palestine* articulating that the membership felt the need for the teach-in "as a result of the reprisals students, faculty and student organizations have faced for simply speaking about Palestine in the workplace". The union also strongly protested the critique that the toolkit targets Jewish students as 'abhorrent'.

On February 4, [13 Liberal and Green Party MPs wrote a letter to 27 universities](#), thanking the presidents for their "time to address concerns about antisemitism on campus, the protection of Jewish students, faculty and staff, and on confronting calls for genocide." In regard to anti-Palestinian racism, the MPs wrote:

Unfortunately, dehumanization and vilification of the Palestinian people, and stigmatization of those advocating for their legitimate aspirations, are

commonplace. While not occurring within the university setting alone, students, faculty and staff are being directly impacted in significant ways.

The MPs thus similarly asked university presidents what they were doing to protect faculty, staff and students from rising tensions on campus, support and engage with student groups and unions, to protect academic freedom and to propose peaceful solutions, conflict resolution etc. York University [responded](#) on February 22.

The purpose of this event timeline is not to offer an exhaustive documentation of campus incidents since October 7 2023, but rather to offer a glimpse into the current campus climate and to underscore how it has been a fertile ground for anti-Palestinian racism. As the Palestine Solidarity Collective shared during the survey planning process, York University has a history of “publicly mischaracterizing and condemning Palestinian solidarity on campus... making Palestinians and their allies feel unsafe on campus”. The university administration’s inability and lack of interest in fostering an environment where students and faculty members can research, write, teach, learn, and converse about the history and politics of the occupation and protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine; and, the highly disproportionate impacts borne by the Palestinian peoples, formed the backdrop for the surveys.

The Surveys & Design

While similar in intent, the two surveys this report builds on were administered separately, one by the Race Equity Caucus (REC) and the other by York's Palestine Solidarity Collective (PSC-York).

The **Race Equity Caucus** is one of the five caucuses in the York University Faculty Association, the others being the Queer Caucus, the Disability Caucus, the Indigenous Caucus and Glendon's Caucus d'équité raciale/Race Equity Caucus (CERREC). REC is a very active caucus, with more than 100 members, advocating for critical equity work across York, specifically dedicated to supporting racialized faculty and postdoctoral fellows at the university. REC engages with the university's [Decolonization Equity Diversity and Inclusion \(DEDI\)](#) mandate, organizes annual fora addressing issues of race and equity, while also supporting YUFA in advocating for a more equitable Collective Agreement.

The REC Survey Subcommittee met with a plan to document the impact of the genocide and the concomitant political repression of raising awareness about Palestinian issues, including the emotional and mental health impacts on students, staff, and faculty at York. While the subcommittee started off thinking about student voices, the decision to expand the scope to include faculty and staff was taken, given what the caucus was hearing from its membership, and because the PSC-York survey (discussed below) had outreached to students primarily.

The REC survey aimed to capture experiences in classrooms, on campus, and online, in regard to anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia, and the nature and extent of political repression for Palestine solidarity work. The subcommittee started by discussing their own various experiences on campus following October 7 2023, and the best possible ways to document student experiences keeping safety and anonymity in mind. The subcommittee discussed various ways of gathering narratives, and decided to opt for an online survey that would allow anonymous narrating of experiences.

[REC's survey](#) focused on both general and specific experience of Palestine solidarity. It was open to students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Its set of five questions asked respondents to share the type of experience, whether these were acts of avert aggression, microaggressions, and/or accusations, both in person and online. These could include, but were not limited to, incidents of anti-Arab

and anti-Palestinian sentiment; Islamophobia; aggression towards members of the Jewish community who are in solidarity with Palestine; self-censorship or fear of reprisals due to Palestine solidarity work; efforts to criticize and silence any historical nuancing of the October 7 attack on Israel as anti-Semitic; and assumptions that certain solidarity began only after October 7. They were given space to describe the incident and provide evidence where available. Respondents were asked to record how safe they felt to have conversations on Palestine and the contextual realities regarding the state of Israel on campus; and whether they felt that the university fosters a sense of belonging for everyone in its community. Respondents were offered space to share their contact information should they wish to be contacted for additional details. A number of respondents shared additional information and documents when the committee subsequently followed up.

The survey went live on February 13 2024, and received submissions for inclusion in this report through to April 30 2024. Within this timeframe, the REC survey received 68 responses³. The following image shows the breakdown of REC survey respondents according to affiliation with York.

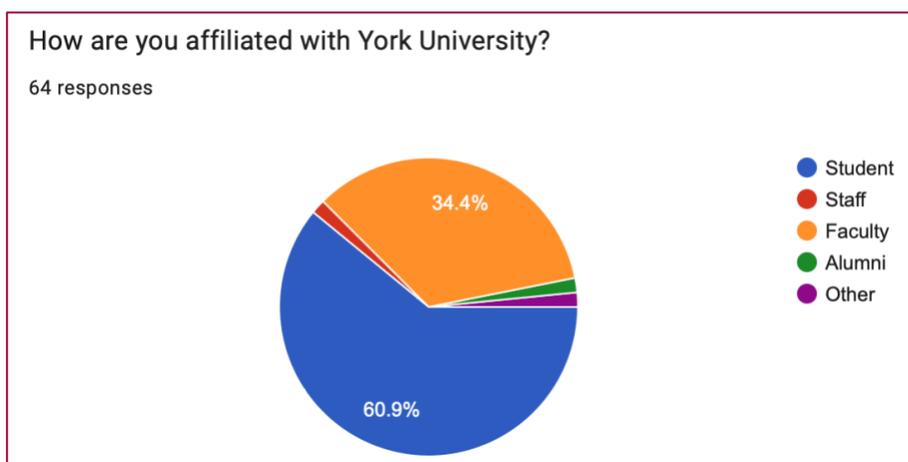


Figure 4 Pie chart showing the breakdown of respondents to the REC survey. The vast majority of respondents (60.9%) are students, with one third being Faculty (34.4%).

In the presentation of findings, direct quotes from responses received are sometimes used. Each survey response is identified by a number (#1-#68).

³ It should be noted that *five* survey respondents out of 68 highlighted their criticism of the survey in their submission, as discussed in this report's [Disclaimer](#). *One* survey submission was submitted in mockery by someone who used Yasser Arafat as their name. *Four* survey respondents reported on anti-Semitic experiences rather than the negative experiences that the REC survey was aimed at capturing. These ten submissions are not discussed in the Findings section.

The Palestine Solidarity Collective at York (PSC-York) is a Palestine solidarity and Palestinian student cultural club at York University. PSC-York advocates for Palestinian rights and culture through a variety of ways, including promoting and working as a Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) group/movement on campus. PSC-York raises awareness about the history of Israel's occupation and colonization of Palestine and the oppression of Palestinian people, while promoting Palestinian history and culture. On York's campus, PSC creates solidaristic alliances with other oppressed, marginalized, and racialized groups. Additionally, PSC-York advocates for the protection of freedom of expression on campus, and the protection of student groups from the York University administration. PSC-York acts as the main body for hosting, orientating, integrating, and advocating for Palestinian refugees in coordination with administrative and student bodies involved in refugee-related initiatives.

PSC-York received reports from Palestinian and Muslim students being targeted on campus for wearing keffiyehs, being followed by known anti-Palestinian agitators, and being harassed by faculty for their Palestinian solidarity stance which prompted PSC's survey creation. The PSC survey specifically focused on anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab and Islamophobic incidents on campus, and was geared towards capturing the experience of existing students, as a result of reports received. The PSC-York survey asked students similar questions to the survey circulated by REC.

The PSC-York survey ran from October 22 2023 to April 30 2024, receiving 22 responses. All respondents were students except for one York faculty respondent, who completed the PSC-York survey given that no alternatives were available at the time. Specific findings taken from responses to the PSC-York survey directly are indicated as such.

1. Silence and Inaction from York University Administration

Many survey respondents noted the institutional silence by York University early on, given the atrocities committed by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Palestine, and in Gaza specifically. Numerous respondents cited the public statements released by the President's Office. Respondents felt that while the university unequivocally condemned the Hamas attacks on Israel, it barely mentioned, let alone condemned, the declared genocidal campaign in Gaza by the IDF. One respondent (#49) refers to "multiple correspondences" from the Vice President which, "empathized with the Jewish community" but did not once express a similar sense of compassion to their Palestinian counterparts, nor denounced rampant anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab, and anti-Muslim racism on campus - some of whose incidents had been reported to the President's Office.

For many members of the York University community, some having affective ties with Palestine including family members directly impacted by the ongoing genocide, this silence translated into their suffering being unseen and unacknowledged. This is described as resulting in a form of double punishment, reinforcing the unfathomable pain of witnessing the horrors in Palestine - and feeling alone in this, layered upon the actual horrors committed in Gaza.

Given that York University proudly proclaims its commitment to decolonization, equity, inclusion, and diversity (DEDI), the silence about the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian population, and on reported cases of racist incidents against Arab and Muslim members of our community, has left many feeling excluded and unsafe in unprecedented ways at the university. "Where are our DEDI champions and special advisors on the question of Palestine?" one faculty respondent (#52) asks. As one student respondent notes, "I feel unsafe by any emails that I receive from York admin because all of them feel inattentive to students of colour, Muslim and Palestinian students" (#64).

Initiatives at the individual, collective, departmental, and faculty levels, as well as direct communications with the university administration have further been met with inaction and at times repressive and punitive measures. For example, one faculty member notes that after receiving pushback from their department in response to their request to release a statement on the genocidal campaign in Gaza, they took it upon themselves to draft one. Their statement was rejected on the basis that "it read like a political manifesto" (#14). In the case of a REC

statement released in October cautioning of a genocide, and asking for a ceasefire, some faculty not only demanded that colleagues and departments not support it, but in fact, they worked to obstruct its dissemination. Rationales against departmental and other statements, on the grounds that academic departments should not interfere with political matters, the respondent notes, revealed stark double standards as past conflicts elsewhere have generated various forms of active mobilization from their colleagues.

As the responses remind us, boundaries between external and internal political issues are commonly blurred and artificially enforced, reflecting underlying ideological, political, and economic interests. In fact, as it is reported across multiple survey responses, a widespread unwillingness to raise concerns about rampant anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia on campus through such means as departmental statements, faculty motions, or even departmental, faculty and union-based discussions, have triggered feelings of alienation, loneliness, and anger among many respondents. Respondent #14 notably points out that after graduate students approached their department to propose a vote in favor of a statement on anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, the initiative ended up being inconclusive because many departmental members either opposed the motion or abstained from voting.

Another faculty survey respondent pointed to the unprecedented difficulties of speaking against the ongoing genocidal campaign, including being doxxed, facilitated by the chilling atmosphere they have felt at York University. One senior faculty reported being approached in October and November by three junior faculty who had included issues of decolonization or Orientalism in their curriculum. In all three cases, a student reported their teaching to their chairs. While teaching such material often made students uncomfortable, rarely did it lead to complaints in the past. Moreover, in the context of statements by the administration, these three junior faculty members not only felt vulnerable to the violation of their academic rights, but unsafe in seeking support from the administration. Given Minister Dunlop's statements, the termination of employment for some of those who raised critical questions of the genocide, and the violent doxxing of faculty in other Universities that included death threats, these junior faculty were fearful. The senior faculty reported that the junior faculty had little support outside of REC.

Multiple faculty respondents noted that during YUFA Stewards meetings, when Palestine advocacy actions and instances of anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia have been discussed, "hurtful accusations" and "threats of lawsuits"

(#13) were made as a result of a persistent and misleading conflation of anti-Semitism with being critical of Israel. Another faculty respondent reported that at several discussions of Palestine, two particular faculty members were “verbally aggressive (shouting and personalizing their attacks)” (#68), creating a toxic climate not only towards those speaking on the topic, but attempting to silence further dialogue. Despite the violating practices such as shouting, neither were asked to stop. Similar accusations of anti-Semitism are raised repeatedly in the response to the REC survey.

We note that survey responses indicate that such situations have occurred across multiple spaces on campus and within multiple conversations, ranging from criticisms of Israel, condemnations of the ongoing genocide in Gaza by the IDF, criticisms of Zionist associations on campus, and public displays of solidarity with Palestine through the signing of the REC statement - as just a few examples. One anti-racist scholar (#63) notes that their expressed approval of the CUPE teaching for Palestine toolkit, their disapproval of the suspensions of colleagues involved in extramural solidarity protest at Indigo, and their email regarding Palestine Day of Action in which the word “genocide” was used have all led them to being accused of anti-Semitism by other colleagues.

When agreements have been reached to release statements, these commonly have resulted in toning down the atrocities committed in Palestine by Israel, and rather, as a respondent (#17) puts it, “presents the genocide as an equal conflict.” Propositions of amendments to these statements, resulting in tireless continuous and exhausting labour through writing and re-writing, and countless email correspondences and meetings, are commonly undertaken by some of the most precarious members of departments and research units. Graduate students and contractual instructors have, in most cases, been met with defensiveness, even when abiding by a strict, if tacit, “conflict avoidance” rule and “dismissal” of the genocide. One PSC survey response submitted by a recently hired faculty member highlights the difficulty they have had in organizing “a panel discussion” aimed at highlighting “international war crimes and humanitarian injustice happening in Gaza.” Again, rationales aimed at blocking this scholarly initiative implicitly targets the so-called lack of ‘scientificity’ of it, with pushback from program colleagues pointing to the issue being “too fresh.”

It should further be noted that regardless of their outcomes, attempts to push for departmental and/or unions’ statements calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire and condemning the genocidal campaign committed by the IDF in Gaza have come at a heavy price for those undertaking this labour. Indeed, responses

shed light on the exhaustion resulting from writing statements, sending countless emails to organize community members and departments, and proposing motions across multiple spaces from unions to departmental meetings, amongst others. This labour, undertaken in the midst of a genocide in a place where some respondents have direct personal and affective ties, has severely altered the emotional wellbeing and physical health of some York University community members. A faculty member (#52) notes that they feel “guilt about not being able to do much about a genocide as I write” yet, the actions they have actively partaken in, regardless of their impact, have led to them having a “feeling of exhaustion” as they grapple with “battles on many fronts.”

2. *“Community Safety”? The Rhetoric of Repression*

Since October 2023, York University administration have released multiple statements emphasizing the need to maintain “community safety” for all in times of political turmoil. However, these statements have tended to condemn and mischaracterize Palestine solidarity actions on the campus as “unsafe” and “violent,” thus needing to be stopped for “community safety.” For instance, several respondents highlight the fact that in their [October 13 2024 statement](#), university administration refers to the Palestine solidarity statements by the three student unions as being “inflammatory,” and that administration saw the need to explain that “freedom of expression has limits and comes with responsibilities” and that “[i]t must never reach into promoting or justifying violence against unarmed civilians.” Given the mischaracterization of the student unions’ statements and subsequent punishments, several respondents characterize the infringement on academic freedom as a means to denounce Palestine solidarity on campus. Another reported the one-sidedness of this position, as speeches and writings justifying a genocide are not defined as promoting or justifying violence against unarmed civilians.

To many survey respondents, resorting to a vaguely defined and expansive notion of “community safety” has indeed worked as an effective rhetoric to silence and repress any action aimed at showing solidarity with Palestine and condemning the atrocities committed by the IDF in Gaza, which respondents also referred to as Israel Occupation Forces (IOF). “Silence” and “Repression” are indeed words that repeatedly show up in the accounts of multiple respondent experiences in the REC survey as they describe the chilling atmosphere reigning on the York University campus since October 2023, and the negative experiences they have endured as Palestinians and Palestine solidarity activist members of the university.

As the survey responses highlight, a common outcome of repeated calls from the York University administration to preserve “community safety” has been to self-censor their voices, not just as activists, but also as learners, educators, and researchers. Instances of violations of academic freedom exerted by the administration, includes, as one of the respondents points out, the statement released against CUPE’s call to teachers to educate their students on Palestine, which have indeed led some to change their teaching materials to protect themselves, but also to protect their students from the unforeseeable yet likely risk of facing punitive sanctions. For example, a professor (#6) admits that while giving a lecture on political slogans, they refrained from using the “From the River

to the Sea, Palestine will be Free,” proposed by students, and instead, used a slogan from anti-vaxxers. They further considered making revisions to their summer courses to remove the works of eminent Palestinian scholars, such as the late Edward Said, to minimize the risk of tensions and reprisals.

Self-censorship is recurrently raised throughout the responses, particularly prevalent among those occupying the most precarious positions within the university. Fear of administrative reprisals have refrained many respondents from pushing further attempts that they nonetheless consider to be crucial, especially in academic places which they state are in essence designed for vigorous debates and knowledge sharing. One respondent (#29) going up for Tenure & Promotion notably expressed their concerns over student reports to the administration about the critical comments that they have expressed about their political stance on Gaza. This respondent also noted that the persistent conflation of anti-Semitism with critique of the State of Israel completely overlooks the fact that many of the scholarly works they utilize in their teaching have been produced by Jewish thinkers, ranging from Hannah Arendt to Primo Levi. Similarly, another instructor (#43), also in a precarious position as a teaching assistant, points out that the dilemmas they have endured since October have been constant, thus taking a heavy toll on their sense of well-being. Given their supervisor’s fierce condemnation of the REC statement of solidarity with Palestine as “blatant anti-Semitism,” the respondent expresses the fear that their discussing Palestine and attending solidarity marches for Gaza may lead to punitive actions in the form of job loss and loss of supervisory support. One respondent (#38) explains, “I wanted to feel able to be more forth coming in expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people, or even feel able to engage critically with my students about the issue whatsoever, but I felt that doing so may put my job in jeopardy.”

One faculty respondent (#14) points to the “jarring” email “full of insults” they received after they signed the REC statement in October, confirming the immediate consequences of asserting public solidarity with Palestine and condemnation of the genocidal campaign in Gaza. This widespread fear of speaking up in support of Palestine among instructors is eloquently summarized by a precarious instructor in response to the PSC survey:

I think it’s important your group knows that there are professors who stand behind the #freepalestine movement but whom are unable to speak, like me, for fear of retribution (...) I pray the York U administrators begin questioning the dominant narrative soon because it is becoming increasingly difficult to teach in York

University spaces and proudly represent our institution as they stand idly by as an entire population of people are wiped out.

Many survey respondents, both REC and PSC, consider that their voices, their knowledge, and their efforts to bring attention to Palestine have been systematically and effectively repressed, in large part because the administration has upheld a definition of anti-Semitism that includes any critique of the state of Israel and has demonstrated this through the punitive sanctions it has given to faculty, students, and staff for their Palestinian advocacy.

Several student respondents have similarly highlighted the painful dilemmas involved in negotiating the risks of being vocal about Palestine, in the midst of a genocide, and the necessity to use caution in a repressive institutional environment. As one of them (#30) points out, they denounce the “hypocrisy” of an institution that is officially committed to decolonization - given the likelihood of reprisals, they will send their already-drafted letter of condemnation to the administration only after they graduate.

Some respondents further point out that students are in need of safe spaces to share thoughts, experiences and emotions on the ongoing genocide, and places to engage in open, vigorous conversations in this particularly difficult moment. Several highlight that the climate of fear, the violations of academic freedom by the administration, and the repression of Palestinian voices have been particularly strongly felt in the classroom. Students shed light on a range of practices that their educators and figures of authority have engaged in, which have contributed to silencing and alienating them from the classroom environment. One student (#40) who has lost family members in the ongoing genocide points to a professor who, in October, noted their bewilderment at the impossibility for “both sides” to “come to peace,” while failing to provide any element of context to the class on the colonial situation in Palestine and Israel, or even on the ongoing occupation and the repeated attacks on Palestine over the past two decades.

Another student (#42) describes an incident during a graduate seminar session in which, after speaking about Palestine, two students showed signs of impatience and eventually left the class “angry,” to make a statement. The instructor, they note, did not come back to the incident, and did not reiterate a principle that should be central to the learning environment - that there should be openness to engage in vigorous debate in classrooms, including when there are divergent opinions. Rather, on this occasion, it seems that referring to Palestine alone sufficed to trigger the anger of the two fellow students, and the silence of the instructor subsequently normalized this anger.

On some occasions, open disapproval of solidarity marches for Palestine have further been voiced by educators, along with mocking comments. One student respondent to the PSC survey shared they were “horrified” when an instructor dismissed the ongoing genocide and discredited protestors by saying “[if you're really stupid] you should be on that side (...) screaming 'apartheid,' and 'we're oppressed' (in a mocking tone)”.

The push towards self-censorship, the dilemmas between talking about Palestine and disciplinary action facing many members of the university community, and the taxing mental labour of negotiating one’s public actions mindful of the possibility of detrimental consequences on one’s career prospects haunted many respondents. The majority of respondents noted that they have feelings of deep anxiety, feelings of being conflicted, and feelings of being isolated, which also led to feelings of self-blame, guilt, and shame. One alumni respondent (#19) notes that they feel like a “coward for not speaking up more publicly”.

3. From Hyper-surveillance of Palestine Solidarity Initiatives to Institutional and Everyday Policing of Palestinian Voices & Bodies on Campus

For many respondents, the climate at York University since October 2023 cannot be fully understood without careful attention to the politics around race that prevail on campus. The perpetually suspicious gaze that racialized members of the community encounter, and particularly Arab and Muslim members of the community since October 7 2023, is notable. A number of respondents shared that the incessant silencing of their voices, and the surveillance of their movements, have only heightened. As one doctoral student (#55) points out, the increased presence of police forces on campus in the first days following October 7 in itself revealed the racist assumptions that York University community members are subject to. They note:

A few days after the uprising of Oct 7, York decided to call more police to campus which made me completely feel unsafe as a Muslim and a Person of Color. The heightening of security measures on York campus, hundreds of kilometers away from the location of the confrontation, was in and of itself racist because it implied that Palestinian and Muslim people on campus are dangerous to the community (#55).

Institutionally designed repressive measures have also permeated everyday life on campus and, in stark contrast with repeated statements from the York administration on the need to foster “community safety” and “mental wellbeing,” such institutional measures are described as instilling an acute sense of insecurity and a climate of fear among many members who have been active in solidarity work with Palestine.

Routine institutional forms of repression have not been limited to one space, but rather, they have spread across multiple locations on campus through various forms of surveillance and harassment at Palestine solidarity rallies, in classrooms, in York housing, and via hostile interactions with York Security Services. A student (#8) deplors the fact that while they have been accepted for a PhD program “they are considering going elsewhere because of the mental impact of the microaggressions they have endured during the pro-Palestine rallies on campus by the York Security Services, and their being surveilled 24/7 through CCTV cameras”.

Repressive measures in the form of paid leaves of absences that the York administration has given to students, faculty and staff who have publicly spoken

up for Palestine since October 2023, and the repeated violations of academic freedom for “security reasons” that have been enforced, have further legitimated forms of everyday harassment towards community members, including in virtual spaces, where respondents have reported being both susceptible to, and victims of, doxxing.

Several respondents noted that the racist interruption by police officers of Palestinian-Canadian scholar Dr. Muhannad Ayyash’s talk on campus in February 2024 cannot be understood in isolation from the rampant and increasingly explicit anti-Palestinian racism prevalent on campus. As one respondent (#1) notes, calling on the police to interrupt the space had an “alarming and triggering effect” on the audience, and “it cannot be explained by any other rationale than this: the presence of a Palestinian scholar on our campus is already a potential threat to ‘our’ security.”

This pervasive racist conflation of Palestine with danger has further legitimated unrestrained forms of everyday hate acts and speeches against Muslim and Arab members of the York University community, or those perceived as such, as revealed in the words of one of the PSC-York survey respondent:

Whilst on a campus I had been making a phone call while speaking Arabic and as I ended the call a group of students walked by and one of them spat onto my foot and said “terrorist scum” and they all walked away laughing. I felt offended and it made me realize that I wasn’t fully protected on campus.

Many respondents report being targeted by more ordinary and direct forms of anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Arab racism, and Islamophobia. Showing signs of solidarity with Palestine, notably by wearing a keffiyeh, has led many to recurrently experience racist slurs, such as being called a terrorist. Others have witnessed members of the York University community openly blame Muslims for the ongoing atrocities in Gaza. One student respondent (#11) noted that a York staff facilitator for a support service complained about protests for Palestine and framed the ongoing genocide as the inevitable consequence of the “invasion of Israel” by “those damn Muslims on October 7” (cis). The respondent notes that “damn Muslims” was repeatedly used.

One PSC survey respondent recalls a similar incident during a campus rally where a couple standing beside them started staring at them and stating out loudly that “the real problem was Muslims” and that protestors should not “believe them,” since they are the “real terrorists.” Another student respondent (#44)

witnessed a student openly justifying the killings of Palestinians in order to suppress the innately violent nature of Arabs. This student said, “these Arab terrorists will soon be vanished and then we can all go back to our peaceful lives (*sic*)”.

More subtle versions of this anti-Arab racism have manifested in the classroom, some professors inquiring about their students’ sense of safety on days of rallies for Palestine, and thereby implying that such protests are *de facto* dangerous and that they pose security threats to York University community members. The double standards activists for Palestine face are blatantly palpable, as respondents note that they have not witnessed similar concerns for safety on campus during other peaceful protests. As one student PSC survey respondent points out:

My professor saw flyers about the demonstration from her department and proceeded to ask the class “did anyone feel unsafe coming on campus today?” I’m not sure what she intended by asking this statement but it felt very Anti Arab because why would she ask the class this question about a peaceful protest, when York has had many other demonstrations she’s never asked this. (*sic*)

Some respondents further point to other forms of everyday anti-Arab racism that have become far more overt since October 2023, as serving to deflect from the current atrocities committed in Gaza, and to invalidate solidarity actions for Palestine. One student (#55) points to the circulation of Orientalist tropes about the “backwardness” of Arab cultures, justifying, if implicitly, the atrocities experienced by Palestinians in Gaza. In conversations with colleagues, the student goes on to explain, they have been “reminded” that as a member of the LGBTQ community, they will never be accepted in Muslim and Arab societies. Other respondents note the increasingly vocal expression of a white nationalist sentiment cautioning against the Palestinian flag which “wants to replace the Canadian flag” (#7).

These forms of unrestrained racisms against Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians on campus - commonly doubling the effects of the same processes happening outside of York University - such as on public transit, in some of the respondents’ neighborhoods, and in the city rallies; have created, among many of the respondents, an unprecedented sense of insecurity and fear for physical harm. This is poignantly revealed in the words of a graduate student respondent (#64):

We started locking our doors removing anyone suspicious from our social media, my partner even deactivated their Instagram page permanently because of the amount of threats they were receiving. I feel silenced and in danger on and off campus. I don't stay out after sunset and I ask my partner to do the same.

These findings unfortunately confirm an established pattern of response by York administration to matters pertaining to Palestine. In that sense, what the respondents experienced, while deeply disturbing, do not come as a surprise. What is new, however, is the context within which these were experienced.

As seen in [Figures 6 and 7](#) below, REC survey respondents overwhelmingly do not feel that York fosters a sense of belonging, and the vast majority do not feel that the university is a safe space to have conversations on Palestine and contextual realities regarding the State of Israel.

4. Growing Distrust for York University Administration

Together, the various dimensions of the experiences of York University community members on campus since the onset of the ongoing genocidal campaign by the IDF against the Palestinian population of Gaza, have created palpable tensions in campus relations. A growing sense of distrust was shared by many respondents against the York University administration, as well as some faculty holding leading positions - such as departmental chairs. As previously highlighted, this is manifested in one's disengagement from social events on campus and in expressed uncertainties about one's willingness to remain a member of York University in the future. In fact, the very hesitancy of many respondents to share their negative experiences on campus for being vocal about their Palestine solidarity work speaks volumes about the growing sense of alienation that a significant number of university community members have felt for the past few months. Many, notably, did not want to share supporting materials that they held to provide evidence of their negative experience. Revealingly, one student points to the "more balanced outlook" (#62) that other higher education institutions have expressed during the ongoing genocidal campaign committed by the State of Israel in Palestine.

Beneath the multiple measures taken to repress members engaged in Palestine solidarity actions, including those who have allegedly taken part in extramural activist work, many voice concerns about the underlying motives of an institution that has ceaselessly silenced in the name of "community safety" and DEDI principles. As a student (#42) identifying as Jewish, points out, the university administration's material and ideological interests in Zionism are at "the root" of the matter. The weaponization of anti-Semitism, they note, has been repeatedly used to advance the underlying political and economic considerations at stake, causing harm to the many Jewish members of the York University community who, far from aligning with the Zionist ideology, strive to demonstrate its distinctiveness from Judaism. The student points to the dispossession of their identity, instrumentalized in this context of unfathomable violence, to shift attention away from institutional complicity with the ongoing genocide. As one faculty member expressed, systemic conflation of anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism has created significant material, social, and emotional harm to anti-Zionist Jewish faculty, staff, and students.

Do you feel that York University fosters a sense of belonging and welcome to everyone within its community?

63 responses

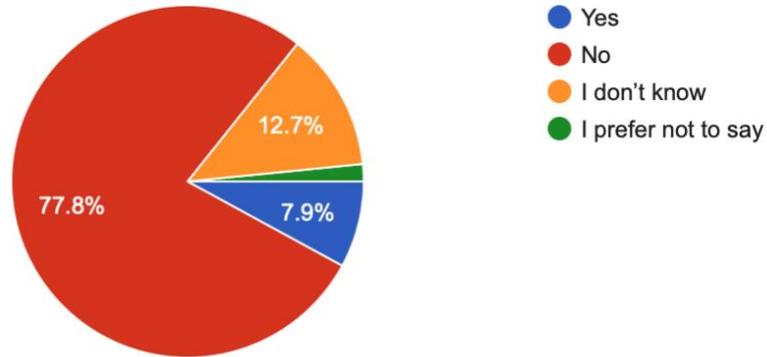


Figure 6 Pie chart showing responses to a question regarding sense of belonging and welcome at York University. Almost 77.8% of REC-survey respondents do not feel that York University fosters a sense of belonging/welcome to all within its community.

Do you feel that York University is a safe space to have conversations on Palestine and contextual realities regarding the State of Israel?

61 responses

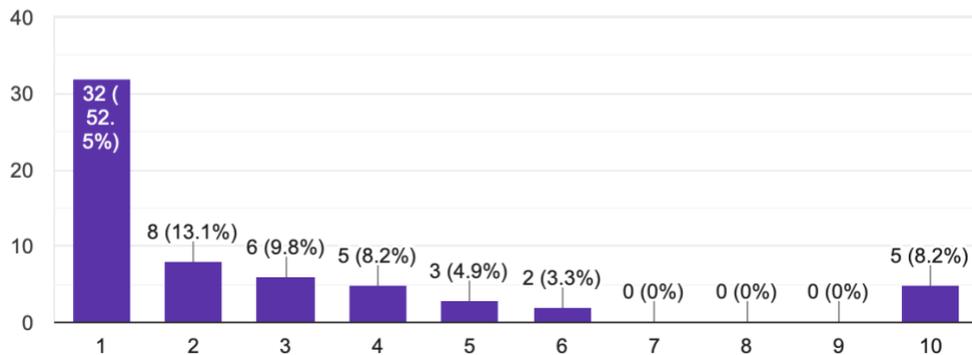


Figure 7 Responses to a Likert-scale question around York University being a safe place for conversations (1 being No, and 10 being Yes). Over half of REC survey respondents do not feel that York University is a safe place to have conversations on Palestine and contextual realities regarding the State of Israel. 5 out of 61 respondents (8.2%) believe York is a safe space for these conversations.

Conclusion: Take Responsibility, Build Trust & Divest

Our ability to talk, teach, and learn about Palestine and Palestinian liberation, as this report shows, has long been under punitive threat at York University. Under the current administration, this threat has deepened exponentially. For example, a key finding outlined in this report is the weaponization of ‘community safety,’ which was on full display as the genocide entered its eighth month.

On the morning of June 5 2024, little more than a month after the York University administration released their statement dissuading possible encampments on university grounds, students established the York Popular University for Palestine encampment on the Harry W. Arthurs Common grounds. In doing so, the students joined neighboring University of Toronto where an encampment had been in place since May 2 2024, and that continued for nearly two months before legal action was initiated to dismantle it. Indeed, York student efforts amplified a larger, international student-led movement headquartered on campus grounds, a movement that is gaining momentum every day to hold institutions of higher learning accountable to their material and ideological investments in genocidal violence.

As the students organizing the encampment wrote, specifically articulating York University’s complicity:

On the 241st day of the genocide in Gaza, our administration has yet to condemn the unrestrained violence against Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli occupation. Even more deplorable is that YorkU remains complacent in its security and military investments as well as academic partnerships with Israeli institutions. To the admin we say: We are here to stay! We will not stop, we will not rest!” (from X account YPUP, York Popular University for Palestine).

The York University administration’s [June 5 2024 response](#) to the encampment stated their “commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom”, and support of “the rights of our community members to advocate for the views they hold”. The statement clearly communicated that the university “will be seeking to establish a dialogue with the individuals in the encampment as well as other

affected parties regarding the issues that have been raised”. Less than 24 hours later however, and in a bizarre contradiction to its earlier message to the community, the administration issued a trespass notice and took aggressive action to end what it called “unauthorized use of campus grounds”. Referring to the student activists as “individuals unknown to the university.” The message further shared that the encampment was “dismantled peacefully” and with assistance from the Toronto Police Services, to “ensure the safety of all concerned”.

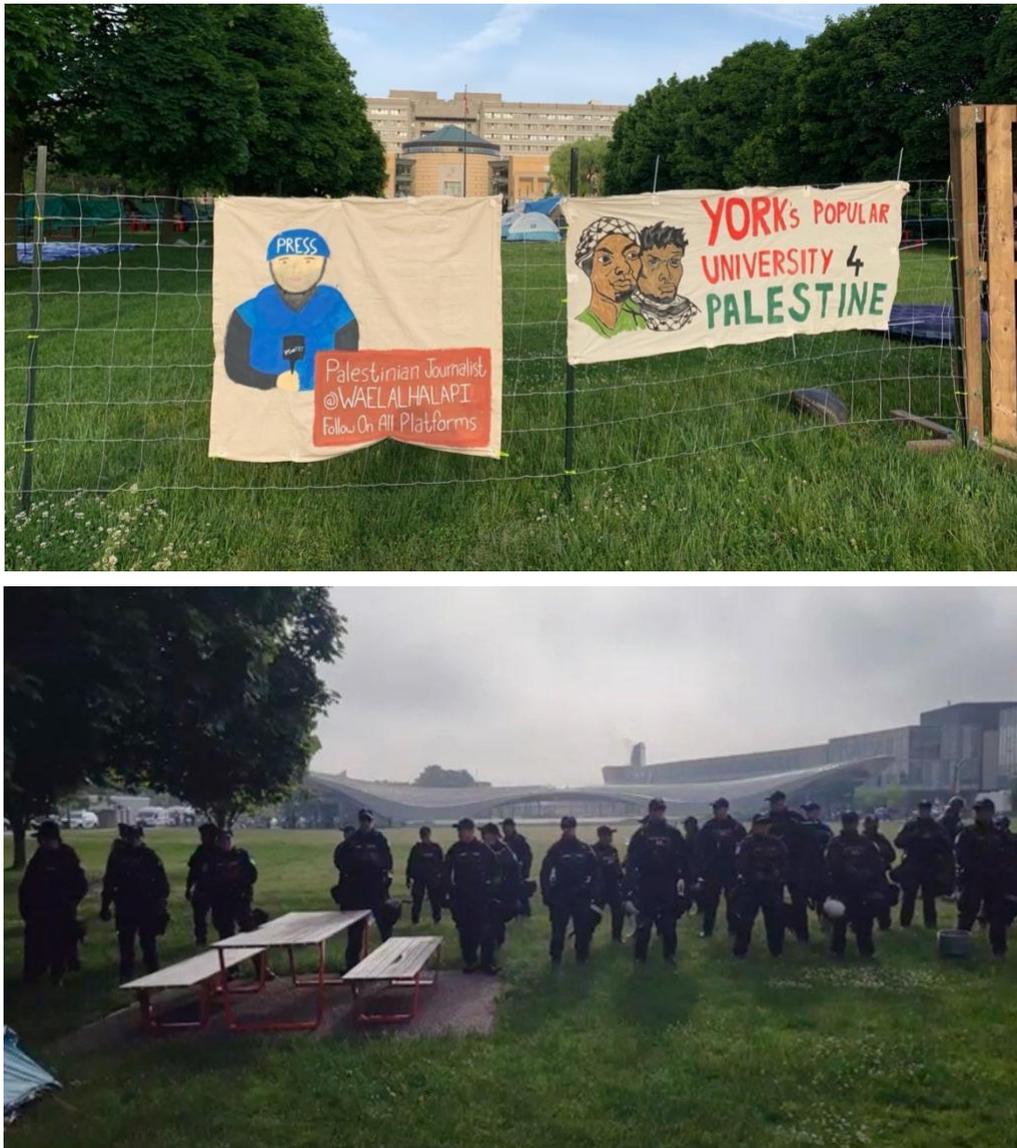


Figure 8 Images of the York University student encampment (June 5, 2024) and subsequent riot police that came in to destroy it (June 6, 2024).

The [administration's communication](#) further went on to state that the community may expect a subsequent message “responding to the concerns that motivated the encampments, including the profound suffering of Palestinians in Gaza”. After months of denial of genocide, lack of support for particularly Palestinian and Arab students, punishment of students and faculty members engaged in solidarity actions, and a most disturbing violation of charter rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly - [this statement](#) was received by the York University community as disrespectful, disingenuous, indeed offensive. It was widely condemned, including through an [open letter](#) to York University President Lenton and the York University Board of Governors, signed by over 220 York University faculty members. The York University Faculty Association (YUFA) strongly called on the administration, reminding them that the university is seated on public grounds, and that the administration and the Toronto Police Services should “model respectful speech rather than violent action.”

Just hours after the York Popular University for Palestine was destroyed, York University community members held a rally in protest of the administrative and Toronto Police Service action. Joined by their allies across the city, including The University of Toronto People's Circle for Palestine and Scholars Strike Canada, these students, declared their firm commitment to freedom for Palestine, and remembered Palestinian children who are now gone from this world, and those who remain dispossessed. The students also remembered the Palestinian universities that are destroyed in Gaza, and this was done while the students were encircled by an unprecedented number of police and surveillance vehicles.

With great clarity and passion, students articulated how York University is complicit in Palestinian genocide and scholasticide, and these students laid out ethical pathways for York University to divest.

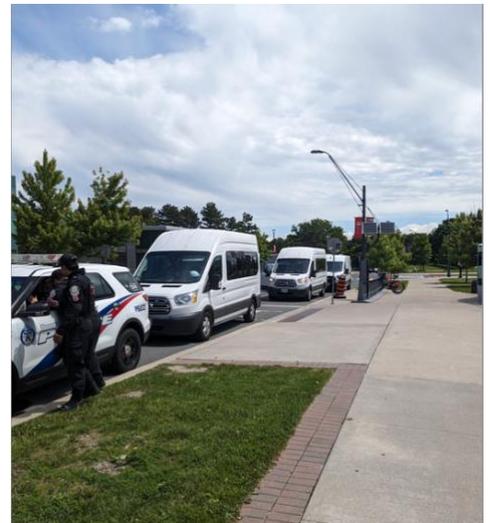
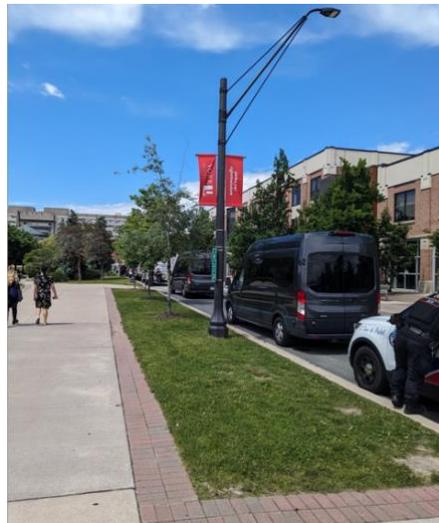




Figure 9 York Community members in solidarity with student encampment, surrounded by security personnel June 6, 2024.

The only way we could end this report, therefore, is with strong hopes for and commitment to following our students' leadership. As Palestinian-Canadian scholar [Muhannad Ayyash \(2024\)](#) said, in response to his interrupted lecture at York University:

grassroots mass action is the best tool we have to decolonize racist settler-colonial structures. It is the students, workers and professors taking direct action who have a shot at radically transforming their campuses in support of the Palestinian people's aspiration for a liberated and free life.

Indeed, what this last year has clarified is that the political repression of Palestine solidarity work that this report documents are clearly due to, and gaining strength from, material relations of profit and power that York University enjoys and entertains.

As such, we join our students in demanding that the York University administration disclose its financial holdings; divest immediately and permanently from all endowments, investments and other financial holdings from Israeli military and security goods; and, boycott all current and future partnerships with Israeli academic institutions that are complicit in the violent occupation of Palestine. Disclosing and divesting such ties would be an important first step in nurturing a campus where vigorous political debates are possible, where

academic freedom is not selectively accorded, and where 'community safety' is not an instrument for repression, rather meaningfully nurtured so complex conversations could be had, like they should be had in a university. The climate of fear, intimidation, mistrust and ill-being currently suffocating dialogue, debate, and solidarity on our campus is the responsibility of York University administration's complicity and inaction.

It is York University's responsibility to rectify.

Acknowledgements

We thank the survey respondents for making the time to share their experiences.

Your experiences were important to document for the purposes of a better, truly safer, and equitable campus.

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Appendices

A. REC response to criticism towards survey, February 20 2024

RESPONSE TO REC SURVEY BACKLASH

On Tuesday, February 13th the Race and Equity Caucus (REC) at York University sent out an email containing a survey link to collect data on “Negative experiences resulting from Palestine solidarity at York University.” Attached to the email was a backgrounder detailing the need for such data collection:

Both historically and escalating since October 7, 2023, there have been several incidents on York University campus where Palestine solidarity and/or criticism of the State of Israel has been met with hostility and repression. Examples include surveillance of campus gatherings/rallies in support of Palestine; unlawfully disciplining faculty for peaceful political action; and inciting students to challenge their instructors and TAs for teaching on Palestine. As regards the undergraduate student experience since October 7, the Palestine Solidarity Collective has received reports of discrimination faced by York University students.

The backgrounder continued:

In response to this deeply divided campus where members, [particularly those critical of the state of Israel and in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, are silenced, threatened, unacknowledged, unsupported, and heavily securitized, the Race Equity Caucus has developed this survey to help capture the negative experiences of York University students, staff, and faculty members. This survey is for individuals to report any related incidents of being made to feel unsafe, silenced, intimidated, alienated, or gaslighted in the wake of the events following October 7.

It is deliberately focused to capture multiple forms of negative experiences located in Palestinian solidarity, whether these are acts of overt aggression, microaggressions, and/or accusations, both in person and online. These include but are not limited to: incidents of anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism; Islamophobia; aggression towards members of the Jewish community that are critical of Zionism; and self-censorship for fear of reprisals due to pro-Palestinian views or solidarity work.

On February 2, 2024, the Department of Anthropology at York University sponsored a lecture by Dr. Muhammad Ayyash entitled “The Palestinian Struggle for Liberation: Aspirations for a Decolonial Life” as part of their seminar series, “Unsettling Anthropology.” Before Dr. Ayyash’s talk could begin two Toronto Police officers came to the room and informed those gathered that they had been called there by the university because there was a ‘major event’ taking place with the potential to be dangerous. Toronto Police Services on campus subvert York’s own campus police procedures. And the university’s response that they do not know who called the police nor how they were able to come on campus is part of the background of the REC survey on anti-Palestinian racism and the current repressive and unsafe environment. The university administration has offered neither a public explanation nor a public apology to the campus community or to Dr. Ayyash.

After REC sent out the survey to collect data on negative experiences resulting from Palestine solidarity at York University— some people have taken it upon themselves to criticize the scope of the REC survey, given that it is not collecting data on self-reported antisemitism against Jewish people who are Zionist. They have contacted the Provost and YUFA—even though this is a REC project and not a YUFA one. These complaints direct our attention to exactly why REC’s data collection initiatives are necessary. REC’s attention to the specificities of anti-Palestinian racism within our white supremacist, settler-colonial institution is much needed. That people would try to prevent such a survey from happening, with the assumption that one cannot talk about anti-Palestinian racism along with Islamophobia without also discussing anti-Semitism, is yet another indication that such a survey is needed.

For the purposes of the expected report, REC will maintain the focus of the initial survey on “Negative experiences resulting from Palestine solidarity at York University.” We encourage the continued distribution of the survey to faculty, staff, and students — which can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/yorknegativeexperiences>

B. Letter in support of the REC survey by members of the Jewish Faculty Network, February 20 2024

Members of the Jewish Faculty Network released the following letter to a colleague* who had expressed concerns about the survey:

February 20, 2024

Dear [REDACTED]

We are writing as Jewish faculty members in response to the letter you sent [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] we are all involved in organizing around solidarity with Palestine on campus and in other spaces. We find your speaking out on behalf of Jews to be reductive and a mischaracterization of our own sense of what it means to create safety on campus.

Your central concern, as raised in your public letter, appears to be that a survey about racism that doesn't include antisemitism is itself racist. But this is a willful misreading of the REC survey and accompanying background document, both of which make it clear that the survey is not about racism and antisemitism generally. The survey does not, for example, ask about anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism or anti-Asian racism. Rather than trying to cast a wide net, the REC survey is very specifically designed to gather information about institutional attempts to silence pro-Palestinian voices, a silencing campaign that is not reducible to Islamophobia, and that has extended to anti-zionist Jewish community members as well. In this context, the survey is a welcome intervention into Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR), the definition of which includes the erasure and suppression of Palestine solidarity actions. According to the [Arab Canadian Lawyers Association \(2022\)](#):

Anti-Palestinian racism is a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives. Anti-Palestinian racism takes various forms including:

- *denying the Nakba and justifying violence against Palestinians;*
- *failing to acknowledge Palestinians as an Indigenous people with a collective identity, belonging and rights in relation to occupied and historic Palestine;*
- *erasing the human rights and equal dignity and worth of Palestinians;*
- *excluding or pressuring others to exclude Palestinian perspectives, Palestinians and their allies;*
- *defaming Palestinians and their allies with slander such as being inherently antisemitic, a terrorist threat/sympathizer or opposed to democratic values.*

These forms of APR have been mobilized heavily since October 7, including at our own university. As your public letter makes clear, you are aware of an event at York where police were called to the public lecture of a Palestinian scholar discussing Palestinian liberation. We have no doubt you are also aware that the homes of our colleagues were invaded by police based on allegations of posting an Indigo bookstore, leading to their suspension from York University. And, you will know that the Minister of Colleges and Education read the names of Palestinian-allied university members into the Legislative record as part of a campaign to “name and shame” them as antisemites. These select, well-known examples offer ample evidence that there is cause for pro-Palestinian colleagues to experience a “chill”, on campus and beyond, that requires investigation. It is also clear that those community members who have experienced APR have been isolated, intimidated, and denied institutional support. Documenting those experiences is the object of the survey, and we agree that such documentation is much needed if we are to address it as a shared workplace problem.

Denying this need and, instead, employing the language of safety, antisemitism, and Jewishness as a cover for your own discomfort with criticism of Israel's actions is unacceptable. Indeed, your reaction to this perfectly legitimate survey, organized by a caucus of which neither you nor we are members, clearly manifests why this survey is necessary. As you are no doubt also aware, Israel lobby organizations are carrying out public, targeted campaigns against educators who criticize Israel and people have been [been fired, suspended, or not hired](#) for engaging in pro-Palestinian speech. We call on you to respect the need for the safety of Palestinian and Palestine-allied colleagues and recognize that APR is a form of racism and silencing that is distinct in its own right.

Ultimately, we are profoundly disturbed by your attempt to silence colleagues who are specifically trying to challenge a culture of silence regarding the ongoing genocide in Gaza. We are even more deeply alarmed that you would do so in our names, by calling on a falsely imagined universal "Jewishness" and "antisemitism" that requires redress. Indeed, as Jewish faculty, we would have hoped that, rather than direct your unease at BIPOC colleagues, you would raise your concerns about racism with groups and individuals who are engaged in surveilling, repressing, and attempting to criminalize those who stand in solidarity with Palestine. We believe that this kind of solidarity is also precisely what will most effectively address antisemitism. If we agree that "never again" means "never again for anyone", then all of our movements against all forms of racism will be stronger.

We invite you to forward this letter to those with whom you shared your original comments.

Signed,

A solid black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the sender.

** **Erratum:** In the initial version of the report, the original email from the colleague was anonymized by the editorial team and included. As this was done without the colleague's knowledge or consent, we have since removed the letter from the report at their request.*

C. Vice Provost-Students' Letter, April 30 2024

Dear York Students,

I hope that you are all doing well as you are finishing the 2023-2024 academic year and looking ahead to the summer.

I am reaching out to talk to you about York's [commitment to open and respectful dialogue](#), and about our collective efforts to create inclusive and welcoming campuses. The pain and anger experienced by members of our community due to what is happening in Gaza and Israel are real, and we affirm the rights of our community members to peaceful free expression in response. We are guided by the following principles:

- **Safety is our top priority:** Every member of the York community must be safe on our campuses. Students, faculty members, instructors and staff have the right to fully participate in all facets of university life without harassment, intimidation, threats, disruption or acts of violence.
- **Discrimination will not be tolerated:** Targeting any member of the York community based on their race, religion, national origin, or any other identified characteristic is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated.
- **We respect the right to free speech and the free exchange of ideas:** York is committed to the fundamental values of free expression, free inquiry and respect for genuine diversity of thought and opinion. It is the right of all community members to express their views within the law and without fear of intimidation or harassment or the promotion of violence.
- **We are all responsible:** Every group and individual member of the York community must uphold these principles. There is a collective and individual responsibility to protect the rights of every member of the York community to a safe environment in which ideas can be freely exchanged.

Over the past number of months, York students demonstrating and counter-demonstrating have worked collaboratively with the Division of Students, Campus Safety, and the Temporary Use of University Space Office to ensure the safety of participants and have also provided marshals and other supports to help prevent escalation. We commend the many students and student leaders who have worked diligently to support peaceful demonstrations. We hope to continue to work with students and other community members to ensure that your rights to free speech are maintained in a safe manner in accordance with University policies.

We recognize that across North America, community members at a number of universities are currently engaged in protests, including encampments.

We want to remind you that York University is private property and any unauthorized use would be a violation of the Trespass to Property Act and University policies -encampments or occupations are not permitted under these regulations.

Our primary concern is that encampments pose a significant health and safety risk to participants and can lead to escalations between different groups, including through the involvement of non-community members. The university may not be adequately able to support or ensure participant safety; hygiene, access to washrooms, and litter are concerns; outdoor cooking or heating are hazardous; and especially after dark the risk of assaults and other harmful or dangerous conduct is heightened.

We will also continue to work with community members to ensure that incidents of anti-Palestinian racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism do not occur. All community members should be able to rely on our campuses being respectful and safe for everyone.

We are calling on all members of our community to treat each other with empathy and compassion as we navigate these issues together.

I wish you all the best as we move into the summer, and as always, please [reach out](#) if you have any questions.

If you need support, connect with [student services](#) and [well-being resources](#). Graduate students can also visit [student services for graduate students](#) and [graduate student wellness services](#).

Best wishes,

Nona Robinson
Vice Provost Students

D. REC Letter on University Encampments, May 7 2024

Solidarity Statement on Student Encampments and Divestment from Palestinian Genocide Race Equity Caucus / Caucus d'équité raciale of the York University Faculty Association

Student encampments are establishing themselves across colleges and universities in North America and around the world. Through these encampments, students are demanding that their colleges and universities disclose their investments in weapons manufacturers and Israeli institutions and corporations complicit in Palestinian genocide. Beyond financial disclosure, these students are demanding that their colleges and universities completely divest from Palestinian genocide, which they identify as the 75+ year settler occupation of Palestine by Israel as well as the escalating violence since October 7th, 2023. As educators within these institutions of higher learning, we must explicitly show solidarity with students across North America as they call for divestment from genocide.

Since November of 2023, 11 of the 15 universities in Gaza were wholly or partially destroyed by Israel; a month later, that number grew to include all universities in Gaza. **Scholasticide** has been used to describe the systematic assault on Palestinian education, educators, and students within Israel's long-standing settler colonization and occupation of Palestine. This destruction not only includes the demolition of institutions of higher learning but also the targeted killings of students and educators. That institutions of higher learning are the site of encampments is both poetic and a testament to the ongoing movement to build Palestinian solidarity in North America through education.

On Saturday April 28th, the traditional council of the Kahnawake nation released a statement sharing the historical context of colonial genocide in Turtle Island: *"through the same colonial infrastructure...exported to israel to genocide upon the Palestinian People, under the united nation's creation of the so-called state of israel."* The statement extended solidarity with the student encampments at McGill University specifically and throughout North America. Drawing upon its authority, the council affirms *"in accordance with the Two Row Wampum Peace Treaty, we [the Kahnawake nation] grant the full right to those who are occupying McGill and other campuses throughout Turtle Island to be upon the said lands, with the expressed intent of engaging their administration to divest from the colonial genocide of israel upon the Palestinian People and from the war machine in general."* It is crucial to the decolonial movement that the Indigenous stewards bestow expressed permission to students at McGill University to occupy the university to demand divestment from genocide. Academic institutions must take this statement seriously and honour their land acknowledgements as more than mere rhetoric.

As we have seen throughout North America, student encampments have been met with administrative responses that call for police to "clear out" student encampments. This disciplinary response has escalated police violence towards both students, community members, and educators calling for disclosure of and divestment from Palestinian genocide. As the days go on, a clear pattern has emerged amongst universities and colleges that have called on the police to clear encampments: police violence is rampant against students, community members, staff, faculty, and the press, and leads to mass arrests, bodily harm, and the destruction of student and public property.

Given these trends, we can expect – and therefore warn against – police responses to the student encampments. We call on colleges and universities with student encampments, including McGill University, University of British Columbia (UBC), University of Ottawa, and University of Toronto, and McMaster University, to recognize permission given to students by the Kahnawake nation to occupy space at McGill University and across Turtle Island in opposition to university investments (material and ideological) in Palestinian genocide. We also urge all of the aforementioned campuses against inviting police to brutalise community members both a part of, and outside of, the university and college community.

As racialized educators committed to equity we recognize that hostile responses to students demanding divestment from genocide is related to broader dynamics surrounding anti-Palestinian racism. We recognize that Palestinians have the right to full humanity and dignity, which is what student encampments calling for divestment in opposition to genocide seek to achieve. We stand in solidarity with our students in Toronto and students throughout North America and the world calling for disclosure and divestment from Palestinian apartheid, occupation, and genocide.

E. Department of Sociology Statement, Nov 1 2023

In Defense of Academic Freedom at York University

The Executive Committee of the of the Department of Sociology extends our heartfelt compassion and solidarity to all members of our community who are grieving in this moment. We condemn all acts of hate and violence. We stand firmly against all forms of oppression and discrimination, including all forms of Islamophobia, Antisemitism, and racism.

The Executive Committee of the Department of Sociology is resolute in its support of all members – faculty and students included – who speak up about the current war in Palestine/Israel and who bring their expertise and experience to bear on public conversations. We are, therefore, deeply alarmed by the email from the York University administration of Friday, October 20, which we interpret as an effort to silence such crucial conversations. We are equally concerned that the University administration assumed, on all of our behalf and without consultation of any kind, that it is required to take drastic action against elected members of student groups at the University.

York University is a diverse intellectual community constituted by many views on a range of social and political issues and both students and faculty have a great deal to offer on matters of such significance. The University's protection of academic freedom, the right to freedom of speech, and the right to raise troubling questions and challenges to established beliefs is even more important in times of crisis.

It is the role of the University to remain politically autonomous and to respect a diversity of viewpoints. At a minimum, York University must ensure a space for meaningful dialogue and engagement for its faculty and students without fear of reprisal. Furthermore, an institution committed to academic freedom must gather evidence and engage with its communities before it exercises disciplinary authority. We believe that the procedures the university has initiated are a violation of due process and democratic principles of justice through the presumption of guilt on the part of the student unions, with the burden of proof being placed upon them to demonstrate innocence. In failing to meet this bar, we are concerned that our administrators have put York University into disrepute. We wish to make it clear that this cannot be done in our names.

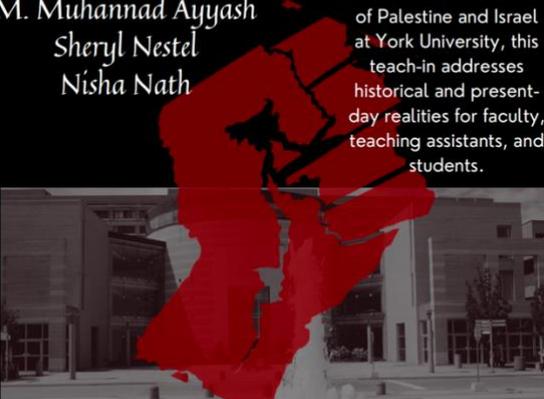
Executive Committee, Department of Sociology
25 October 2023

F. Selection of Palestine Solidarity Efforts at York University

**ACADEMIC UNFREEDOM:
SPEAKING AND TEACHING PALESTINE**
A teach-in by the Race Equity Caucus, York University

Speakers:
Jasmin Zine
M. Muhanad Ayyash
Sheryl Nestel
Nisha Nath

In considering important questions about academic freedom in the context of Palestine and Israel at York University, this teach-in addresses historical and present-day realities for faculty, teaching assistants, and students.



6-8 PM ET, NOV 21, 2023 ON ZOOM
[REGISTER HERE](#)

**Our Legal Rights When Facing Reprisal
For Supporting Palestine**
6.30 pm ET, Dec 20, 2023 on Zoom
[Click here to register](#)

Speakers:
Nusaiba Al-Azem, National Council of Canadian Muslims
Rani Khan, Muslim Legal Support Centre
Stephen Ellis, Legal Centre for Palestine



Co-sponsored by Race Equity Caucus (REC) at York University and Independent Jewish Voices (IJV)

WE STAND WITH YORK FACULTY AND STAFF

Stop campus reprisals!

Reinstate them NOW!

Permanent ceasefire NOW!

Join us for a York walk out in support of the York peace activists/Indigo arrestees put on administrative leave by York senior admin

When: Tuesday, November 28, 2-3PM

Where: Vari Hall rotunda



Organized by a coalition of York faculty from 10 units
JOIN US VIA QR CODE

Subject: Please circulate: Teach-In on the Picket Line: Within and Against Precarity (Wed March 6, 10:30a onwards)

Within and Against Legal Precarity: Situated Narratives From the GTA

TEACH-IN on the Picket Line: In solidarity with CUPE 3903 workers

Wednesday March 6, 2024 (starting at 10:30a)

Law creates and maintains precarity, as well as renders certain lives and livelihoods precarious. However, the precariat also always resists. To this end, precarity is also a space for resistance and solidarity. As such, we invite stories, insights, and reflections on precarity as a site of radical possibility.

The Journal of Law and Social Policy (JLSP), in conjunction with the Global Labour Research Centre (GLRC), are hosting a one-day ~~symposium~~ **TEACH-IN on the Picket Line**. Come hear about the struggles of tenants, migrant and sex workers, social assistance recipients and others in relation to the struggles of CUPE 3903 workers.

G. Palestine Solidarity Collective Events

Small/medium events of less than 150 people:

Name of Event: Healing Circle

Date: November 6, 2023

Location: First Student Centre room number 336



Name of Event: Palestine Solidarity Art Build

Date: January 16, 2024

Location: First Student Centre room number 336



Name of Event: The Role of International Media and Law in Palestine

Date: March 18, 2024

Location: Zoom

Name of Event: Independent Jewish Voices Workshop

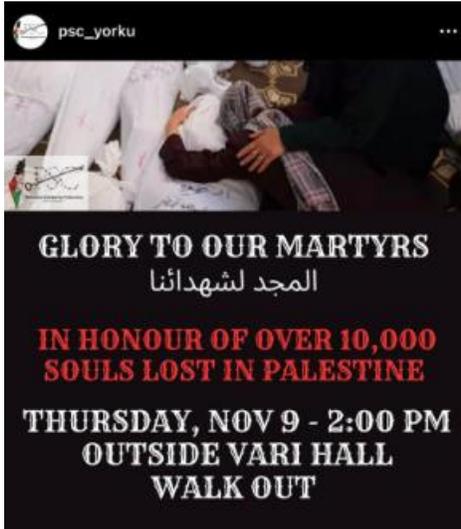
Date: November 20, 2023

Location: Zoom



Large events of over 150 people

Name of Event: Rally/ Vigil To Honour Lives Lost in Palestine
Date: November 9, 2023
Location: Outside Vari Hall



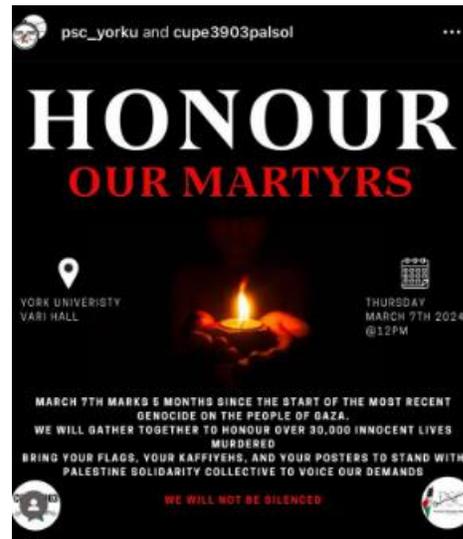
Name of Event: Rally To Call for Ceasefire
Date: November 17, 2023
Location: Vari Hall



Name of Event: Rally/ Town Hall on Palestine Solidarity Activism
Date: January 17, 2023
Location: Rm 402 Second Student Center



Name of Event: Rally/ Vigil To Honour Lives Lost in Palestine
Date: March 7, 2024
Location: Vari Hall



H. Selection of Statements from York University Units, Fall 2023

- Department of Sociology, December 6 2023
- Department of Social Work, December 5 2023
- Osgood Hall Faculty Association, November 2 2023
- Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change Council, October 19 2023

Emergency Motion to Demand Reinstatement of York Employees

Department of Sociology, York University
December 6, 2023

The Department of Sociology demands the immediate reinstatement of recently suspended York employees, including Professor Lesley Wood, a valued and highly respected colleague in our Department. Wholly grounded in unproven allegations, this suspension is unjustified and fundamentally undermines our Department and the University as a whole.

This suspension has thrown our Department into disarray, affecting our students, faculty members, officers of the Department and Graduate Program, and administrative staff. It has created a great deal of uncertainty in our undergraduate and graduate programs and compromises the integrity of several courses.

The suspension threatens academic freedom, in the Department of Sociology and at York University generally. It undermines our fundamental right to freely speak out about public matters as citizens and members of the York University community without fear of reprisal.

There is no evidence that Professor Wood has breached her professional obligations, as defined in Article 11 of the YUFA Collective Agreement. Extra-curricular activities, including political protest and other means of free expression, are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The CAUT policy on Academic Staff and Criminal Conviction indicates that being charged with or accused of a crime is not grounds for suspension, except in the most exceptional cases.

Rather than representing a “neutral” or reasoned position, the decision to suspend York employees is based on unproven allegations while actively contributing to the misleading narrative that these York employees present a “danger” and, therefore, must be kept at a remove from the institution in the name of “safety.” We categorically reject the biased, arbitrarily expansive, and deliberately vague notion of “community safety” that serves as a rationale for the suspensions of these employees. This distortion of the concept of safety to justify suspending Professor Wood directly compromises the learning environment for her students, who have lost access to their course director, advisor, and/or mentor. We also condemn the way in which this use of the notion of safety is having a silencing effect upon other members of our Department and of the University as a whole. Meanwhile, the University has maintained silence as these employees have been threatened, harassed, and doxxed – a silence that violates the institution’s obligation to uphold, protect, and promote academic freedom.

We expect that York University will respect due process, including the core value of the presumption of innocence. More than any other institution, a University has a responsibility to await the outcome of legal proceedings before pursuing any disciplinary or non-disciplinary action against an employee.

We further expect that the University will uphold academic freedom and freedom of expression, foster, and contribute to informed public debate on the substantive meaning of these foundational values, as well as be a space within which they thrive. To its credit, York University has developed a bold mission and vision that values, among

other things, “cultivating the critical intellect”, “exploring global concerns”, “academic freedom”, and “social justice,” which, in combination, are intended to create a “learning environment committed to the public good.” To these ends, the University follows a collegially developed Academic Plan that prioritizes a “progressive approach” as well as “diversity and inclusivity”, and that is “passionate about advancing social justice and equity.”

The Department of Sociology is committed to these collegial values. We demand that our administrators vigorously uphold and defend the same by immediately reinstating these York employees, including Professor Wood.

Israeli Apartheid, Academic Freedom, and Reinstatement of York Colleagues

Approved Faculty Meeting December 5, 2023

Dear Social Work Community and Colleagues across York University,

We are reaching out today to say that we recognize how tragic and difficult the last few weeks have been inside and outside of the classroom. We are witnessing the horrendous ethnic cleansing and genocide of Palestinian people in Gaza. We have many students who are afraid for their families, friends and communities in Palestine and Israel – places engulfed in violence and military combat through decades of Israeli occupation in Palestine. We condemn the October 7th Hamas attack and the resulting loss of life. We also condemn Israel’s response, and the support for genocide shown by the Canadian government and many other governments of the Global North. As a School, we remain committed to fighting all forms of oppression and discrimination, including Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism, and antisemitism. Now is the time to stand by and renew these commitments. Like many institutions and organizations, our institution as well is engaging in debates and there are conflicts of opinions, but we are particularly concerned about threats to, and policing and silencing of pro-Palestinian voices on this matter. In moments like this, the university has a unique and special role to protect a variety of views, academic freedom, and freedom of speech, a role that does not succumb to political pressure in the legislature,¹ or revert to undue process and punishment of student groups.² As such, we strongly oppose the York University Administration’s response to faculty and students who have been placed on administrative leave in relation to their activism against the current military offensive against Gaza and Israeli apartheid broadly.³ We extend our solidarity to those who are being targeted with rising Islamophobic and antisemitic violence and harassment, as well as those being wrongly accused of antisemitism and/or charged with a “suspected hate motivated crime” due to their efforts to expose Israeli apartheid.⁴ Indeed, efforts to shut down critiques against Israeli apartheid are widespread and significant.⁵

We seek the following:

1. A clear public statement from the York University Senior Administration reaffirming that the university has a mandate to operate free of political interference.

¹ <https://nationalpost.com/news/canadian-universities-face-challenges-navigating-israel-hamas-war>

² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/york-university-israel-hamas-statement-update-1.7004246>

³ [Israel's apartheid against Palestinians - Amnesty International](#); [Israel's 55-year occupation of Palestinian Territory is apartheid – UN human rights expert | OHCHR](#)

⁴ https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/york-university-sees-walkout-after-putting-faculty-staff-members-on-leave-in-wake-of-charges/article_d95d5073-2dc8-5c95-ba45-43d69fb41c8b.html

⁵ https://www.iivcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Unveiling-the-Chilly-Climate_Final-compressed.pdf; [Naomi Klein to Heather Reisman: Charges must be dropped against Indigo 11 * The Breach \(breachmedia.ca\)](#)

2. A clear public statement from York University Senior Administration concerning the autonomy of student organizations when such student organizations hold political opinions that are distinct from those of the senior administrators and/or political party that forms a government at any given time.⁶
3. The reinstatement of our colleagues, faculty, students and staff who have been accused of engaging in political protest, that is being deemed as “hate motivated”, without due process or a basic presumption of innocence.

As a School of Social Work, we intend to continue to draw attention to and organize teach-ins and events that contend with the ongoing military occupation and violence that unfolds in Gaza and Israel.

⁶ Drawn from Department of Sociology “In Defense of Academic Freedom”, November 1, 2023.

OHFA EXECUTIVE STATEMENT DEFENDING ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Posted 2 November 2023

The Osgoode Hall Faculty Association (OHFA) Executive understands that this is a difficult time for many of our members, with the conflict in the Middle East. We strongly condemn all violence against civilians. We stand strongly against anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinian racism, Islamophobia and other forms of hate. We affirm the importance of academic freedom, especially in times of conflict. Regardless of their views and tone, and so long as they act within the law, OHFA members are accorded academic freedom and should not face disciplinary action for expressing their scholarly views.

The OHFA Executive is deeply concerned about the statements made in the Ontario legislature on October 17, 2023 by Jill Dunlop, Minister of Colleges and Universities.

In addressing a debate on the current conflict in the Middle East, Minister Dunlop named an Osgoode Hall Law School Professor, Heidi Matthews, and other professors, as well as students from York University and elsewhere. They were labelled anti-Semitic and accused of “celebrating” terrorism. The Minister also implied if not encouraged university administrations to pursue disciplinary actions against the named individuals.

Article 11.01 of the [Collective Agreement](#) sets out the administration and OHFA’s shared and ongoing obligations to “upholding, protecting, and promoting academic freedom as essential to the pursuit of truth and the fulfillment of the University’s objectives.” Academic freedom includes the freedom of an OHFA member “to disseminate her opinion(s) on any questions related to her teaching, professional activities, and research both inside and outside the classroom.” We believe that the exercise of academic freedom extends to [social media postings](#) and that the administration has an obligation to support OHFA members in the pursuit of research, creative and professional activities *free of “interference or reprisal”*.

The OHFA Executive endorses the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)’s [letter to the Minister](#) and Memorandum 23:41 “Academic Freedom in Times of Conflict,” as well as the [statement on academic freedom and campus safety](#) from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA).

We take the position that, as stated by CAUT, “any institutional reprisal against or censorship of a member for expressing, within the law, their views on matters of public interest would violate their academic freedom.” Further, we share CAUT’s characterization of the Minister’s remarks as “a serious infringement on the principle of university autonomy.” The OHFA Executive holds steadfast to the view articulated by OCUFA that the

Minister's assertions are "antithetical to the academic mission of our universities." We call on the administrations of Osgoode Hall Law School and York University to forcefully defend academic freedom, university autonomy and freedom of expression of staff and students by publicly denouncing the Minister's statements and demanding an immediate retraction and public apology.

The OHFA Executive

Motion passed by EUC Council, October 19, 2023:

The Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change at York University unequivocally supports the academic freedom of its members. This freedom includes the right to pursue research and open inquiry in an honest search for knowledge that is free from institutional censorship, including that of governments.

The Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change at York University acknowledges that the freedom from political and institutional censure is especially critical at times of war and conflict where scholarly voices are an important corrective to widespread disinformation campaigns.

The Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change at York University acknowledges that the administration's response to those supporting Palestinian struggles has a chilling effect on our community including students and staff, and on the academic freedom of our members in the classroom, in their research, and in campus politics more broadly. These repressive tactics must be challenged, and scholars, students, and staff must be free from all forms of recrimination and harassment that may occur due to the nature of their research and political work.

The Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change at York University supports anti-racist and decolonial initiatives in Canadian educational institutions and opposes anti-Palestinian racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia along with all forms of racism and hatred. We will strive to ensure our members are free from experiencing bigotry and hate in our classrooms and campuses. We are committed to protecting the security and safety of all scholars, staff, students, and York University community members who are targeted because of their scholarship and political work. We call upon our institutions to implement measures to safeguard our members.