

We, as a group of faculty from departments across the University of Toronto, write to you today to express our deep concern and disappointment regarding a recent event hosted by the Office of Inclusion and Diversity (OID) at the Temerty Faculty of Medicine (TFOM). On January 26th 2022, the OID presented an event titled “Diversity Dialogues – Professor Irwin Cotler on Contemporary Antisemitism,” in partnership with sponsors including the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies (FSWC).

Holocaust Remembrance is an important occasion to commemorate a grave historical injustice and a day to remember the mass genocide against Jewish people. This year, given the atmosphere of increasing intolerance and the rise of ideologies of hate in our communities, this opportunity was even more urgent. Instead, this event, unfortunately, reinforced anti-Palestinian racism in a way that is consistent with a broader pattern of silencing and erasure of Palestinian voices. Our concerns with this event address both content and form.

Significantly, this event undermined the important work of the University’s own Anti-Semitism Working Group (ASWG), the recommendations of which were accepted in full by the U of T central administration in December 2021. These recommendations clearly spoke to “the distinctive context of the University as a place in which difficult and controversial questions are addressed” and recommended that the University “should not adopt any of the definitions of anti-Semitism that have recently been proposed.” This specifically excludes the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, a definition that has been widely criticized for conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism. The IHRA working definition has been used in multiple contexts internationally to silence voices speaking out against anti-Palestinian racism and advocating for justice. Despite this recent and clearly stated position - the result of extensive consultation and deliberation across the University - the speaker at the TFOM event focused centrally on lobbying for the IHRA working definition of antisemitism and repeatedly labeled legitimate criticism of Israel as examples of antisemitism. Here are but a few examples of many, referenced below by indicating the time on the [recording provided by the TFOM](#) of the event:

- 13:35 - 16:23: A list of [UN resolutions](#) criticizing Israel for its violation of the rights of Palestinians is given as an example of antisemitism
- 21:50 - 25:00: Condemnation of Israel for its actions against Palestinians in the declaration that resulted from the [UN sponsored](#) “World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance” is used as an example of antisemitism.
- 24:15: Referring to Israel as an apartheid state is used as an example of antisemitism.

Note further that in the latter example in particular, we’d like to bring to your attention the recent findings of [Amnesty International](#) (and of [Human Right Watch](#) and Israel’s [B’Tselem](#), in 2021) that demonstrate the ways in which Israel meets the criteria of an apartheid state (including territorial fragmentation; segregation and control; dispossession of land and property; denial of Palestinian refugees of their right to return; and denial of economic and social rights).

We are also concerned by the egregious form that this event assumed. In particular, allowing sponsorship of a TFOM organized event by an organization, Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre (FSWC) that has actively targeted colleagues of colour, which has sent a chilling message to other faculty and students. In May of 2021, special interest groups, including the FSWC, harassed, intimidated, and defamed the Temerty Faculty of Medicine Social Justice, Anti-Oppression and Advocacy Theme Lead. In their media release dated [May 21, 2021](#), FSWC supported a letter that called on the University of Toronto TFOM to fire Dr. Ritika Goel from her role. A [campaign of support](#) for Ritika Goel, signed by over 1000 TFOM students, other Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) colleagues and faculty called on the University to create an environment where all students can flourish.

We write this letter within the wider context of ongoing targeting and harassment of medical students and faculty who speak up in support of Palestinian life and liberation. We are aware of students and faculty, including other EDI Leads at the TFOM, who have been receiving “calls into the office” to discuss sometimes anonymous student complaints relating to their personal social media presence. Typically, the source of complaint was their support for Palestinian human rights on their personal accounts, even though such free expression is conducted in a manner that is fully consistent with University of Toronto policies and regulations.

The harassment of students and faculty must be noted in the context of increasing anti-Palestinian racism and intimidation that various Palestinian faculty and students and their allies have experienced and have communicated in numerous meetings held with TFOM leadership, including the Dean. For instance, on January 25, 2022, presciently predating the TFOM event, Palestinian faculty and allies (including several EDI Leads), sent a letter to the OID and Faculty leadership raising these growing concerns. We await a response to this submission, which is attached to this email.

Indeed, this letter documents worrying and persistent behaviour on the part of the TFOM in failing to fulfil its declared EDI vision of universal justice and antiracism advocacy, specifically as it pertains to anti-Palestinian racism. By endorsing content that is in clear violation of stated university positions (such as the recommendations by the ASWG), TFOM is fundamentally undermining its vital commitments to equity and anti-racism.

Thus we urgently call on the TFOM and the OID to take action to:

1. Acknowledge anti-Palestinian racism and confront its rise on campus and to engage with Palestinian faculty and students to take direction from those most impacted.
2. Support the right of all students and faculty, including EDI Leads, to enact their mandate to confront all forms of racism and speak out against intimidation and harassment without fear of reprisal and defamation. This includes defending the right of allies and antiracism advocates to free speech, as already outlined in the University’s May 28, 1992 [Statement](#).

Sincerely,

1. Raed Hawa, Professor, Department of Psychiatry
2. Najib Safieddine, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Surgery

3. Samantha Green, Assistant Professor, Department of Family and Community Medicine
4. Saadia Sediqzadah, Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry
5. Ahmed M. Bayoumi, Professor, Department of Medicine and Institute of Health Policy and Management and Evaluation
6. Michaela Beder, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry
7. Marcia Zemans, Assistant Professor, Dept of Psychiatry
8. Zac Feilchenfeld, Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine
9. Debra Stein, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry
10. James Deutsch, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Psychiatry
11. Nadine Majid, Lecturer, Dept. of Family and Community Medicine
12. Elia Abi-Jaoude, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry
13. Nancy F. Olivieri, Professor, Pediatrics, Medicine and Public Health Sciences
14. Azad Mashari, Assistant Professor, Department of Anesthesiology and Pain Medicine
15. Zainab Furqan, Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry
16. Gary Bloch, Associate Professor, Dept of Family and Community Medicine
17. Muhammad Munshi, Lecturer, Department of Medical Imaging
18. Daniel Rosenbaum, Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry
19. Crystal Pinto, Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry
20. Ketan Vegda, Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry
21. Deborah Cowen, Professor, Department of Geography & Planning
22. Abigail B. Bakan, Professor, Department of Social Justice Education, OISEz
23. Alejandro I. Paz, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology
24. Rebecca Comay, Professor, Dept of Philosophy/Center for Comparative Literature
25. Mohammad Fadel, Professor of Law, University of Toronto Faculty of Law
26. Alissa Trotz, Professor, Caribbean Studies at New College/ Women and Gender Studies
27. E. Natalie Rothman, Associate Professor, Dept. of Historical and Cultural Studies
28. Melanie J. Newton, Associate Professor, Dept. of History
29. Katherine Blouin, Associate Professor, Dept. of Historical and Cultural Studies (UTSC), Classics (UTSG)
30. Anne-Emanuelle Birn, Professor, Global Development Studies (UTSC) and Dalla Lana School of Public Health
31. Girish Daswani, Associate Professor, Dept. of Anthropology
32. Francis Cody, Associate Professor, Dept. of Anthropology and Asian Institute
33. Gavin Smith, Professor Emeritus, Anthropology
34. Malavika Kasturi, Associate Professor, Department of History
35. Ruth Marshall, Associate Professor, Depts of Political Science and Study of Religion
36. Rick Halpern, Professor, Department of Historical and Cultural Studies
37. Atiqa Hachimi, Associate Professor, Department of Historical and Cultural Studies
38. Chandni Desai, Assistant Professor, Critical Studies of Equity and Solidarity
39. Kanishka Goonewardena, Professor, Geography and Planning
40. Bhavani Raman, Associate Professor, Department of History
41. Chandler Davis, Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Mathematics
42. Judith Taylor, Associate Professor, Dept. of Sociology
43. Priyadarshani Raju, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry
44. Ajay Rao, Associate Professor, Department of Historical Studies
45. Zoë Wool, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology