

Oct 30, 2020

Roman Baber,
Chair, Standing Committee on Justice Policy
roman.baber@pc.ola.org

Dear Minister Baber,

I am contacting you on behalf of OCAD Faculty Association, we represent over 600 faculty, educators and technicians at OCAD University.

We are concerned with Bill 168's proposal to re-define Ontario's definition of anti-semitism to include criticism of the Israeli state. The definition of antisemitism adopted by Bill 168 is guided by definition used by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) which seeks to redefine anti-semitism to include criticism of the Israeli state.

Amongst our members are scholars, artists and educators who engage in research and cultural production that addresses the complex dynamics of the conflict and occupation in Palestine and Israel. If this bill were to pass, our members can be unjustly penalized, possibly criminalized. The bill itself will act as a deterrent to research in this issue, censor and possibly criminalize necessary intellectual and creative work, lead to legal harassment and intimidate academics and artists from addressing an issue that must be openly discussed and urgently engaged with.

The definition of discrimination within Bill 168 is too vague and can be used by social actors to silence debate and infringe on the academic freedom of scholars and artists to exercise intellectual and creative activities on the conflict and occupation in Palestine and Israel. The original drafter of the definition of antisemitism used by the IHRA, Kenneth S. Stern has rejected the definition the bill employs and has warned against legislation like Bill 168 as it would "restrict academic freedom and punish political speech".

Internationally, many of the world's leading scholars, artists, humanitarians and educators have taken positions critical of Israel and the Israeli occupation. According to the definition employed by Bill 168, these esteemed individuals would be censored and deemed antisemitic. Included in this list are scholars such Hannah Arendt, Judith Butler, Angela Davis and Achille Mbembe.

OCADFA opposes anti-semitism and stands against all forms of racism, discrimination and hatred. However, we see the adoption of the IHRA definition as a potential threat to academic freedom at our university as it can be used to restrict the intellectual and creative work of artists, educators and scholars who have developed critical perspectives on the policies and practices of the state of Israel.

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Not a single university in Ontario has adopted the IHRA definition of anti-semitism. A Provincial government's attempt to establish the terms for legal and permissible university research and creative practice undermines the autonomy of universities.

We urge committee members to reject Bill 168 and uphold academic freedom and the autonomy of universities to govern themselves with independence from political interference.

Sincerely,



Min Sook Lee
President,
OCADFA

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CC: Vice Chair, Standing Committee on Justice Policy [Effie J. Triantafilopoulos](mailto:Effie.J.Triantafilopoulos@pc.ola.org) (Oakville North—Burlington) effie.triantafilopoulos@pc.ola.org

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