

**SJU ACADEMIC
STAFF
ASSOCIATION**

October 27, 2020

Standing Committee on Justice Policy
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

To the members of the Committee,

I am contacting you as President of the St. Jerome's University Academic Staff Association, which represents the full-time and contract academic staff who teach at St. Jerome's University, a Roman Catholic university federated with the University of Waterloo. Yesterday, the Executive Committee of the SJUASA passed a resolution protesting Bill 168, which seeks to re-define the province's definition of antisemitism to conform to the working definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

The SJUASA condemns antisemitism in all its forms. However, this new definition of antisemitism, along with its list of illustrative examples, is the product of an international campaign to redefine antisemitism to include criticism of the State of Israel. Scholars who conduct research into the dynamics of the conflict and occupation in Palestine and Israel, including those who hold perspectives critical of Israeli state policies and practices, could be unjustly penalized, possibly criminalized, if this bill were to pass into law.

Bill 168 violates the principle of academic freedom in two ways. First, it violates the academic freedom of the universities as autonomous institutions, free from government interference. It should be noted that no Ontario University has adopted the IHRA definition. Second, it violates the academic freedom of individual scholars who teach and conduct research on Israel and on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

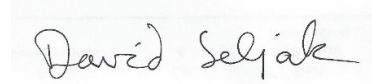
The IHRA definition is weak and ineffective at combatting antisemitism. More specific and robust alternatives, such as that proposed by Independent Jewish Voices, make clear that it is not anti-Semitic to oppose Israeli policies or support Palestinian human rights. A recent poll has shown that a strong majority of Canadians share the view that criticism of Israel is not anti-Semitic. In fact, this survey found that, contrary to the logic of the IHRA definition, there was no correlation between critics of Israel and

antisemitism. Similarly, a letter drafted by Independent Jewish Voices challenging the IHRA definition has been signed by over 400 academics.

If we are to continue to pursue the highest standards of critical and engaged scholarship and teaching in our schools and universities, we cannot accept a law that violates university autonomy and effectively criminalizes legitimate research and debate.

On behalf of the membership of the SJUASA, the Executive Committee asks that you reconsider this ill-advised bill.

Sincerely,



David Seljak, President
St. Jerome's University Academic Staff Association

CC:

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