

July 24, 2024

Toronto Police Service
40 College Street
Toronto, ON M5G 2J3



Subject: Concerns Regarding the Management of Protests, Demonstrations, and Occupations

Dear Members of the Toronto Police Service,

On behalf of the Abraham Global Peace Initiative, a global recognized, Canadian based Human Rights organization dedicated to cultivating fundamental freedoms for all, we are writing to express our concerns regarding the management of protests, demonstrations, and occupations by the Toronto Police Service. We appreciate the opportunity provided by the Ontario Regulation 392/23 under the Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019, which mandates that police service boards establish policies on these matters. This regulation underscores the necessity for policies that balance the constitutional rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly with the imperative of ensuring community safety and preserving the peace.

Since October 7th, 2023, Toronto has witnessed over 600 protests, of which the majority of which explicitly targeted the Jewish community, Jewish places of worship, Jewish schools, Jewish owned businesses, and events linked to the State of Israel. Of grave concern is that each displayed an extraordinary magnitude and increasingly hostile nature. The frequency and intensity of these protests have created a volatile atmosphere that challenges public safety and community cohesion in our city and beyond.

The unprecedented number of hate-motivated crimes has become normalized, almost blending into the white noise of city life. These acts of hate crime cannot be ignored, as they threaten the sense of security and harmony within our diverse communities. For the Jewish community, these incidents have caused fear, anxiety, and a sense of alienation. For the city, they have increased division and tension among residents, making it more difficult to foster a cohesive and inclusive society.

Particularly troubling are the occupations and eventual shutdowns of highway overpasses, which have specifically targeted Jewish communities and neighborhoods along Avenue Road and Highway 401. This targeted approach is not only disruptive but also deeply distressing for those who live in these areas, creating an atmosphere of fear and division. These actions further strain the relationship between different communities and highlight the need for effective management of public spaces to ensure that all residents feel safe and respected.

Additionally, the targeted and repeated vandalism of Jewish-owned businesses (e.g., Old Avenue as one example) along Avenue Road in Toronto, including graffiti and broken windows, is a disturbing trend that undermines the principles of equality and respect that our city stands for. Moreover, this follows the arson attack at International Delicatessen Foods and the Indigo

bookstore vandalism. These acts of vandalism are a direct assault on the livelihoods of individuals and the fabric of our community. They foster an environment of hostility and mistrust, making it difficult for the Jewish community to feel secure in their own neighborhoods.

The threats of violence and shootings at Jewish schools in Toronto are of grave concern (e.g., the Bais Chaya Mushka School, the Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto [CHAT], and the Yeshiva Gedolah of Toronto). These heinous acts not only threaten the lives of innocent children and educators but also instill fear within the entire community. Schools should be sanctuaries of learning and growth, free from the threat of violence. The implications for the larger city include increased anxiety among parents and children, a heightened sense of vulnerability, and a need for enhanced security measures in educational institutions.

Similarly, the breaking of windows, graffiti, and vandalism at local synagogues in Toronto are attacks on religious freedom and tolerance (e.g., the Kehillat Shaarei Torah Synagogue, the Pride of Israel Synagogue, the Anshei Minsk Synagogue). These actions disrupt the sanctity of places of worship and sow division within our city. The Jewish community faces the challenge of protecting their religious spaces, while the city must contend with the erosion of trust and respect among its diverse populations.

The tagging and graffiti in support of Hamas, a “Free Palestine,” and slogans of “From River to Sea” along Eglinton Avenue (e.g., 444 Eglinton Avenue West) demonstrate a concerning rise in antisemitic sentiment. These messages are not just expressions of opinion but are provocative and dangerous, further dividing our city along ethnic and religious lines. They perpetuate an atmosphere of intolerance and hinder efforts to promote dialogue and understanding.

One of the most distressing acts we have observed is the drawing of swastikas on hostage posters of Israelis and Jews kidnapped by Hamas terrorists on October 7th. These posters, found in Toronto public parks (e.g., Cedervale Park), are a blatant expression of hate that has no place in our society. They serve to retraumatize victims, isolate the Jewish community, and foster an environment of animosity and division.

Moreover, the occupation of city streets, shutting down thoroughfares, and the targeting of Mt. Sinai Hospital with protests have significant implications for public safety and the provision of essential services. Hospitals, especially, must be safeguarded as critical infrastructures serving all members of society without disruption. These actions not only endanger lives but also exacerbate tensions between communities and challenge the city’s ability to maintain order and ensure access to vital services.

The illegal occupation of the University of Toronto and York University by Palestinian Circles and encampments further exacerbates tensions. These occupations disrupt academic environments and infringe on the rights of students and faculty to pursue education in a safe and respectful setting. The broader implications include a compromised educational experience, increased

polarization among students, and the need for universities to balance free speech with maintaining a safe campus environment.

We are also deeply concerned about the repeated harassment and intimidation of the Jewish community and its allies. This was on display at Toronto's recent Tastes of the Middle East event at Nathan Phillips Square which saw pro-Palestinian activists co-opt the event and subsequently march throughout the city, using the city event as a meeting point. So too this was on display when pro-Palestinian activists occupied and later hijacked the Toronto PRIDE parade, forcing it to be ultimately cancelled. This behavior, aimed at instilling fear and suppressing free expression, is unacceptable in a society that values diversity and inclusion. Such actions threaten the fabric of our multicultural society, creating divisions that hinder progress toward mutual understanding and respect.

Additionally, the public doxing of Jewish advocates, stores, restaurants, and professionals on pro-Hamas and pro-Palestinian social media sites raises serious privacy and security issues. This practice of targeting individuals based on their identity, or beliefs is harmful and must be addressed with urgency. It poses significant threats to personal safety and privacy, while also contributing to a climate of fear and suspicion.

Equally concerning are the pro-Palestinian protests occurring outside the Jewish Community Centre and its daycare (e.g., the Miles Nadel JCC and the Sherman Campus JCC). These protests not only intimidate community members but also pose a potential risk to the safety and well-being of children and families. For the larger city, these incidents highlight the challenge of ensuring that protests remain peaceful and respectful, without infringing on the rights of others.

There is also a troubling pattern of repeated vandalism targeting the political offices of local city councilors (e.g. James Pasternak), MPPs (Merit Stiles), and MPs (e.g., Julie Dzerowicz and Arif Virani). These acts undermine the democratic process and threaten the ability of elected officials to serve their constituents effectively. They contribute to an environment of hostility and mistrust, eroding confidence in democratic institutions and processes.

While recognizing the complex challenge faced by the Toronto Police Service in policing protests, demonstrations, and occupations, it is crucial to uphold the constitutional rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly while ensuring community safety and preserving the peace. However, the optics of these operations are critical, and a balanced approach must be maintained to prevent any perception of bias or discrimination.

We are also alarmed by reports of individuals driving through predominantly Jewish neighborhoods flying the Palestinian flag, accompanied by the shouting of pro-Hamas slogans. These actions are not only provocative but also create an environment of intimidation and fear. They exacerbate tensions between communities and hinder efforts to promote dialogue and understanding.

The attempted infiltration of the Walk for Israel by Toronto-based activist groups further illustrates the need for heightened vigilance and protection of community events from disruptions. Such infiltrations jeopardize the safety of participants and undermine the spirit of peaceful assembly.

Furthermore, repeated antisemitic and pro-Hamas vandalism found on the exterior of Toronto District School Board (TDSB) buildings indicates a troubling trend that must be addressed with urgency. Our educational institutions should be spaces of learning and respect, free from the influence of hate. These incidents highlight the broader challenge of combating antisemitism and ensuring that schools remain inclusive and welcoming environments for all students.

The divisiveness caused by these incidents has significant implications for the Jewish community and the city. Many of these pro-Hamas activist groups have targeted the police themselves with violence, assaults, and doxing, creating additional challenges for law enforcement and further complicating efforts to maintain order and public safety.

The complex challenge of managing protests, demonstrations, and occupations requires a balanced approach. The Toronto Police Service must navigate the need to respect constitutional rights while ensuring community safety and preserving the peace. Given these operational restrictions, the Public Order Policy should set clear priorities for the Service, guiding the Chief in establishing procedures that align with community expectations and values. Furthermore, we urge the Board to consider the following priorities in the development of the Public Order Policy:

- Ensuring adequate protection for all communities, particularly those facing targeted harassment and violence which include safe zones around schools, places of worship, and the offices of political figures (e.g., counsellors, MPPs, MPs).
- Implementing strategies to de-escalate tensions and prevent further violent confrontations.
- Enhancing collaboration with moderate community organizations to address and mitigate the impact of protests on affected communities.
- Balancing the need for maintaining public order with the protection of individual rights and freedoms.

In conclusion, while the Toronto Police Service faces the formidable task of managing protests and maintaining public order, we urge you to take decisive action in addressing these concerns. We advocate for increased resources, training, and collaboration with community organizations to prevent further escalation of tensions and to ensure the safety and security of all residents.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on this crucial matter and look forward to seeing a policy that effectively addresses these challenges while fostering a safe and inclusive

environment for all residents. We look forward to your response and to seeing positive developments in the handling of protests, demonstrations, and occupations in Toronto.

Sincerely,

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