

I am writing to raise my concerns related to the anti-Israel and anti-Jewish protests that have erupted all across Toronto over the course of the last year. I am troubled that during protests, encampments, and demonstrations, laws relating to mischief, trespassing, lawlessness, and unlawful assembly are not being enforced, particularly when these events have been taking place in major city intersections and predominantly Jewish neighborhoods. More of an effort should be made to address these incidents and to address hate speech taking place in these demonstrations. Although freedom of expression must be protected, many of the messages coming out of these groups are inciting hatred and calling for violence against Jews as an identifiable group; these are severe offences and must be dealt with accordingly. Police should adopt a zero-tolerance approach toward any form of hate speech at public demonstrations and should be trained in both antisemitism and hate crime enforcement.

These protest groups are also responsible for blocking public streets and private businesses and property. While the right to protest should be protected, obstructing access to schools, religious institutions and residential communities is not reasonable and can, rightfully, be limited. The city should be implementing improved protest management such as ensuring protests are not obstructing traffic or preventing people from going about their business. Police should impose safe access zones around places of worship, schools, and community service agencies to prevent them from being used as venues for protest. We should support our police services with the necessary budget and training to maintain peace and order.

More should also be done to manage protests on our city's university campuses. These campuses are private property and encampments that occur on university campuses are considered trespassing and against the law. University leaders should be held responsible for ensuring their campuses remain free from obstructions and, as such, should enforce laws relating to trespassing on university property. Furthermore, encampments have been the source of hate speech (speech / slogans / symbols) directed toward Jewish and Israeli Canadian students. We must ensure the necessary resources and training for police is available to assist campus security when support is needed to manage university encampments and protests. To address concerns about safety on university campuses and public schools, universities and schools should be encouraged to formally request police assistance if they require support dealing with public safety issues that arise on their property.

I am also concerned with the growing use of masking by many protestors. Many of these masked protestors are concealing their identity at public protests in order to conceal their identity while committing hate speech and incitement; this is a criminal offence. Therefore, masked protestors who are engaging in hate speech or that remain masked when a protest transitions into an illegal riot are guilty of an offence and should be prosecuted. Police should exercise a zero-tolerance approach when it comes to any form of hate speech at a public demonstration (which means an additional charge if they're also wearing a mask). To better enforce our hate speech laws, police must be educated on the use of certain sayings and connotations used in an antisemitic context that have an equally negative impact on the community.

To help police manage the increase in antisemitism, police should receive more education regarding emerging hate groups, antisemitism, hate speech and hate crime enforcement. That training should include specific content regarding how to address the presence of antisemitism / acts motivated by hate as part of public demonstrations. This includes understanding the historical context, meaning, and impact of antisemitic and genocidal hate speech, and being able to identify the tactics and symbols used in hate speech and propaganda (including foreign language material), as well as being capable of detecting emerging hate groups using all the above.

Thank you for your consideration