



Network of Engaged Canadian Academics
Réseau des académiques canadiens engagés

Canadian Association of University Teachers
2705 Queensview Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K2B 8K2

April 24, 2025

President McInnes and Executive Director Robinson:

We are writing on behalf of the Network of Engaged Canadian Academics (NECA, neca-rdace.org) an organization of nearly four hundred university and college faculty from across 45 Canadian campuses dedicated to combating antisemitism and upholding academic freedom and viewpoint diversity. The great majority of our members pay dues to the unions or associations that are affiliated associations of CAUT.

We are responding to the March 2025 CAUT “Report on Academic Freedom in Canada after October 7, 2023.” We agree with CAUT that academic freedom is an essential foundation for all academic institutions. However, we were disheartened to see that the Report argued against that very principle. It promotes a peculiar definition of discrimination that restricts academic freedom, while it distorts and diminishes threats to the academic freedom of Israeli, Jewish, Zionist, and allied faculty across Canada. CAUT undermines its own credibility as an Association that purports to defend academic freedom with its singular and biased focus on the academic freedom of pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel academics.

For an Association that purports to have as one of its purposes, “collection and analysis of data and the operation of a clearing house for information pertaining to the social and economic well-being of Academic staff and post-secondary education” (2.2.d) we were puzzled and dismayed by the Report’s lack of research rigour. The Report contains many errors and omissions regarding the pervasive assault on the academic freedom of Jewish, Israeli, Zionist and allied faculty members since (but starting well before) October 7, 2023. The Report’s title suggests that CAUT is concerned with Academic freedom in general as it pertains to all its affiliates and members. In fact, the Report only concerns itself with protecting the academic freedom of those who are opposed to the existence of Israel or to the promotion of particular Palestinian political perspectives.

Academic freedom afforded only to certain groups is not academic freedom. CAUT members who expect it to uphold their academic freedom will clearly see that CAUT offers selective support only for union members who share the ideological viewpoint of the Report's authors. Is CAUT ready to be transparent about the nature and content of the Report and its unwillingness to uphold the rights Jewish, Israeli, and Zionist academics and their allies? The Report pretends to uphold the universal right of academic freedom for all members and, yet it clearly does not.

To be clear, discourse, dialogue, and criticism about Israel-Palestine are legitimate topics, central to academic life, and must be protected by academic freedom. Unfortunately, what we are witnessing on our campuses is a rejection of a certain viewpoint and a privileging of others on this topic. NECA provides below numerous examples in **Appendix 1** of the ways in which our members have had their academic freedom rights abrogated through exclusion, silencing, physically threats, bullying and intimidation.

Errors in the Report (not exhaustive)

Page 1, Paragraph 1:

- The opening statement of the Report is largely false, and thereby antithetical to impartiality, scholarly rigor, and truly open debate. The Report states that “On that date, Hamas militants based in Gaza fired a barrage of rockets into Israel, breached Israeli defences, and conducted a ground attack on nearby communities. In response to the attack, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) within days launched a military campaign against Gaza with the stated aim of eradicating Hamas.” Characterizing the terrorist invasion of Israel as a ground attack whitewashes the truth of the brutality and deprivation of the attack. Twelve hundred, mostly citizens murdered in the most shocking ways including being burned alive. Many were subjected to brutal sexual violence. Two hundred and fifty again mostly civilians including Arab Israelis, Bedouin, Thai people, and Canadians -- were taken hostage. The terrorists targeted families in their homes and those celebrating overnight at a music festival. The kidnapped victims have been held in oppressive conditions and routinely tortured and/or raped – many were murdered and several dozen are still in captivity. And, Canadian citizens were among those murdered in what the Report blandly called a “ground attack.”
- The IDF responded to the Hamas terror attack on civilians after weeks, not “days.”
- Hamas are not militants, they are terrorists under the Criminal Code of Canada and have been since 2002 (see: <https://gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2024/2024-10-09/html/sor-dors178-eng.html>).

- Page 2. In the paragraph beginning “The review of cases reveals...” The authors provide no information about the methodology used to include/exclude cases that allegedly violate academic freedom. The main focus on extramural academic freedom, which is not properly operationally defined or supported by any scholarly literature, excludes issues such as abuse of podium by non-experts, extramural speech of experts where the public cannot differentiate between their scholarly work and their personal opinions. The focus on “extramural academic freedom” also fails to acknowledge the attacks on social media against those who even speak out against antisemitism, which result in a chilling effect. Many Jewish faculty have been regularly targeted online for calling out antisemitism. The personal attacks raise safety fears that carry over into classrooms and campuses. One professor at the University of Ottawa was forced to hold classes in undisclosed locations for fear that there may be attempts to disrupt their classes.
- Page 4 - line 3. Paragraph beginning “A Université de Montréal...” The authors claim that the audio was unclear as to whether Yanise Arab told a pro-Israel supporter to “go back to Poland.” In fact, there were several reliable witnesses to this incident who can attest to what she said. Poland is where two thirds of European Jews perished in the Holocaust and that insult is so shocking that it is indefensible. Moreover, the person who made this abhorrent statement researches the Arab world, a region where hundreds of thousands of Jews fled in the 1950s because of anti-Jewish violence. Many Montreal Jewish people trace their heritage to that region. The insult was multi-layered in its bigotry and unquestionably abhorrent.

Page 4. Paragraph beginning “York University professor Lesley...” The authors mischaracterize Heather Reisman’s foundation, which provides scholarships to former soldiers who lack immediate family in Israel. The attack on Indigo Books took place on Kristallnacht, the anniversary of the day the German state began a concerted campaign against its Jewish citizens. Ordinary Germans vandalized businesses in ways that closely resembled what that group did. Only those with a profound lack of historical knowledge or a hatred of Jews so deep it distorts their thinking could take such action on that anniversary. Jews witnessing this attack also closely identify it with the book-burnings that took place in Germany in the 1930s. How would any such action be connected to academic freedom? When is criminal vandalism ever part of the professional work of any Canadian academic and what are the limits that govern it when CAUT responds?

- Does the CAUT support vandalism and threats against Jewish institutions more broadly? Would shooting at a Toronto Jewish day school or lighting a synagogue on fire be supported given that both have occurred and were justified with claims about alleged Israeli misdeeds? On what basis does it support individuals who disparage public figures with distorted information and justify defacing their businesses? Vandalism is not typically part of an academic’s research or

teaching duties, and it is, in all cases, criminal conduct. CAUT must clarify in what context criminal conduct by its members would be applauded. Would similar conduct be supported if members directed it at other minority groups or in response to another political claim? Would CAUT support vandalism by an Eritrean directed at an Ethiopian bookstore owner or an Azerbaijan supporter who targeted Armenian businesses in defence of its disputed land claims? On what basis would CAUT defend criminal conduct to make claims about one armed conflict but not another?

- Page 6 (bottom): This case is an odd inclusion since the professor who was placed on leave for allegedly making the comments against a Pakistani academic was the subject of an organized campaign to undermine his academic freedom. The professor was dismissed summarily without due process merely for exercising his freedom of expression and academic freedom in extramural posts. CAUT appears to be contradicting itself if it is suggesting that the professor who is a member of an academic union should not be protected from sanctions merely for asserting his academic freedom.
- Page 13 (Summary and Recommendation): “Respect and uphold the essential right of academic staff and students to engage in peaceful protest and counter-protest, and restrict such activities only when there is clear, objective, and demonstrable evidence of danger to persons, **serious violations of the law**, and major disruptions to the essential operations of a university or college.” We query whether less serious violations of the law are acceptable to CAUT? How is engaging in vandalism part of an academic’s job. How is insulting young people at a table in Montreal part of an academic’s job? CAUT arguably should not be ever involved in defending criminal conduct. It is not academic freedom. Instead CAUT should defend those of us experiencing actual harassment and threats.

Anti-Palestinian Racism

As part of the broader strategy to isolate and demonize Israel, Israelis, and Jewish people, detractors have advanced a definition of “Anti-Palestinian Racism” (APR) including in the Report. APR is an unsubstantiated concept that lacks scrutiny by experts, academics, jurists and lawyers, diplomats, civil servants, and elected officials as would be the norm with such concepts (Kogan et al., in press). It is driven by a select group, the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association, advocating specific political views lacking both consensus and rigorous evaluation.

APR advocates discrimination against people of Israeli origin, contrary to the Human Rights Code of Ontario (chapter H.19). And it implicitly denies the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state, contrary to decisions of the United Nations and Canadian policies. CAUT passed motions against the use of Canada’s consensus definition of antisemitism that is part of Canada’s anti-racism strategy on the false grounds that it violates academic freedom. Nevertheless, CAUT promotes APR, which can be clearly

demonstrated to have a direct detrimental effect on academic freedom. The double standard is painfully obvious and cannot be justified.

We are aware that CAUT will be entertaining a motion at its upcoming Spring Council stipulating that CAUT acknowledge and cite the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association (ACLA) definition of APR. Were the ACLA definition of APR to be adopted, Canada's anti-BDS laws and former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's position on BDS and Zionism (i.e., his statement that "Zionism is not a dirty word or something anyone should be targeted for agreeing with") would suddenly be racism. To be clear, discrimination against anyone in Canada based on their country of origin is unacceptable. We abhor and denounce any form of discrimination against people because of their country of origin. Yet, APR introduces categories based on country of origin and political opinion at odds with accepted anti-racism definitions. The Government of Canada's 2024 Anti-Racism Strategy defines the following forms of racism: anti-Asian, anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, antisemitism, and Islamophobia. None cite national country of origin because discrimination based on national or ethnic origin is already protected under both section 15 of the Charter and under Canadian and provincial human rights legislation. The Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission affirmed this in a 2024 public letter: "The OHRC has determined that existing grounds in the Ontario Human Rights Code provide the necessary protection to deal with any potential form of discrimination based on or concerning race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, or creed, such as anti-Palestinian racism"¹

To be clear, discrimination against anyone in Canada based on their country of origin is unacceptable. We abhor and denounce any form of discrimination against people because of their country of origin.

The definition of APR proposed by the ACLA seeks to intensify an already divisive debate by pitting groups against each other in what resembles a zero-sum game of competing claims of discrimination that undermines unity and collaboration in combating prejudice. Furthermore, unlike other definitions of discrimination against a particular group, this haphazardly crafted definition crosses the line from defining their own group's oppression to redefining another people's oppression by misrepresenting antisemitism. CAUT incorrectly states that IHRA would restrict academic freedom. In fact, the ACLA's APR is the product of a rushed attempt to capitalize on the vulnerabilities of Jews to delegitimize their existence in academia and broader society.

In sum, ACLA APR negates the Jewish experience, identity, and values. It treats a core aspect of Jewish identity as racist (Note that 94% of Canadian Jews said they support the existence of a Jewish state in Israel whereas only 1% say they are antizionists (Brym, 2024; Brym, in press). It also restricts legitimate scholarly activities by experts wishing to explore research on Palestinian narratives as well as the Middle East conflict. **Thus, APR is a dangerous restrictor of free speech and academic freedom and must not be considered for adoption.** Importantly, existing legislation and definitions

¹Chief Commissioner of the *Ontario Human Rights Commission*, November 5, 2024.

of Islamophobia and anti-Arab discrimination provide Canadians with the necessary tools to protect Palestinians from hate. (see “Anti-Palestinian Racism Definition in the University Context,” by Janice LaForme of the Alliance Combatting Campus Antisemitism in Canada, submitted to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights June 2024). Instead of addressing the legitimate concerns about discrimination directed at Palestinians, this definition distorts the concept of racism, using it to **silence any dissent against pro-Palestinian political ideology. It is an obvious threat to academic freedom.**

Student Encampments

NECA strongly supports peaceful protest, debate, and criticism of policies of any nation or governing body and we view this as essential to university life. We also recognize that universities have a right to establish and enforce policies that stipulate the time, place, and manner in which such protests occur. In the case of student encampments, the CAUT Report fails to recognize the many instances in which occupants openly posted “No Zionists allowed,” which means, of course, that most of their Jewish classmates were excluded from parts of their own campus by their peers. Other examples include, as noted above, calling for Jews to “go back to Europe” and for an “intifada revolution.” A Hamas flag was displayed at the University of Ottawa encampment and other symbols of terror and violence were observed and documented. Encampment occupants have also prevented Jewish members from entering public spaces, which is a crime.

At the student encampment at McGill University, students created an effigy of Israel's Prime Minister, dressed it in concentration camp garb, and hung at the entrance of the university. This action can only be understood as a racist threat that would make any reasonable person fearful. Equally troubling were instances when students threatened well-established Jewish student clubs by seeking their removal from campus or by attending a club meeting and banging on doors and screaming at their fellow students inside a classroom. Again, such actions are intended to silence diverse points of view and the organizations where Jewish students gather.

We are also concerned about some of the demands that were made by encampment organizers. **Barring faculty members based on their political views and ending academic partnerships is a threat to academic freedom and will stifle debate and diversity. It sends a chilling message to Jewish students and faculty.**

Conclusion

To truly grasp the state of academic freedom after October 7, CAUT must also consider the chilling impact that threatening, anti-democratic speech, protests, and activism by those claiming to support Palestine have on many Canadian faculty members. This includes Jewish members of the university community, scholars whose research includes Israeli academics of any political or religious affiliation, and the many others who simply wish to carry out their work without interference, and who hope that our

Associations—and CAUT—will prioritize our working conditions over politically divisive viewpoints held by a subgroup of members who are committed to one narrow political viewpoint. The Report undermines solidarity. The only reasonable course of action is for CAUT to withdraw the Report, rule the related motion to update it further with content that will threaten academic freedom of Canadian faculty as out of order based on discrimination, and commission a new investigation with a rigorous transparent and inclusive methodology that properly documents how academic freedom is being degraded across Canadian institutions of higher learning for all union and association members. A new committee should be struck that is charged with this task and should be composed of members who are able to examine the facts objectively and without prejudice. CAUT, as an organization that purports to protect academic freedom must do so for all Canadian academics.

Sincerely,

NECA Executive Committee

References

Brym, R. (2024). Jews and Israel 2024: A Survey of Canadian Attitudes and Jewish Perceptions. *Canadian Jewish Studies Études Juives Canadiennes*, 37. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1916-0925.40368>

Brym, R. (in press). What does Zionism mean to Canadian Jews? A longitudinal study of semantic drift. *Canadian Jewish Studies Études Juives Canadiennes*, 41.

Kogan, CS, Butler, D, Walker, P, Sandler, M, Baldachin, C, Mohammed, Y. (in press) The Legal and Societal Perils of Introducing the Concept of Anti-Palestinian Racism in Canada. *International Journal of Minority and Group Rights*

Appendix 1: Examples of Academic Freedom Violations of Jewish, Israeli, Zionist and Allied Faculty

Note: This list of incidents was collated from members of NECA who are Canadian faculty members. Where names are omitted, it is to protect the identity of the individuals due to safety concerns.

- Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) campaigns have been adopted by numerous faculty unions and associations since October 7, 2023. BDS calls to end all partnerships with Israeli universities and research projects. These demands are exclusively directed at one country, Israel, and are intended to end dialogue, research collaborations, and the free exchange of ideas. Such efforts, based primarily on false narratives, are contrary to Canadian values. They undermine academic freedom and opportunities for advanced, international scholarship with all Israelis of all religious and ethnic backgrounds. BDS is a clear threat to academic freedom and yet CAUT fails to clearly and publicly reaffirm the perils of BDS to academic freedom. BDS is also a clear violation of the CAUT purpose that calls for the Association to establish and maintain international relations with Academic staff in other countries (2.2.e).
- A Chair of a department was doxed for refusing to sign a pro-encampment statement.
- Since Oct 2023, York's Centre for Jewish Studies' social media communications about all of the academic things we do - guest lectures, concerts, symposia, panels, scholarly awards, new publications from our affiliated faculty members (almost none of which has anything to do with Israel; it is merely about Jewish subjects) - have been bombarded with shocking, hateful, and profoundly disturbing antisemitic comments. The Centre has had to disable comments, thereby dismantling two of the basic functions of social media (promotion and interaction) lest it re-circulate anti-Jewish hate. This targeting has quieted the Centre's appetite to share their academic offerings with the wider communities in which they travel, and has been a force of bullying silencing of our academic freedom and sense that our scholarship matters to the broader community of scholars - and publics - to which the Centre's members rightfully belong.
- On Friday before Passover 2025, the Azrieli Institute was vandalized causing extensive damage with broken glass, graffiti and destruction of property that was followed by social media doxing against Prof. Csaba Nikolenyi as the director of the program in Israel Studies. A student group boasted about their support for this criminal action on their social media channel. The university swiftly and decisively condemned the attack and so did the faculty union. Please see below the coverage of the event by the local English press as well as the university's statement.

<https://www.montrealgazette.com/news/local-crime/article872349.html>

<https://www.concordia.ca/cunews/main/stories/2025/04/11/condemning-antisemitic-vandalism-targeting-concordia.html>

- A faculty member objected to a candidate for membership on a Chair Search committee on the grounds that the colleague in question was a Zionist. When the person chairing the meeting rejected this line of reasoning, other colleagues defended the objector. A procedure was then followed whereby only candidates with a certain number of votes would be included on the list submitted to the Dean, and the rumoured Zionist did not make the list, even as a low-ranked option. This was a violation of the colleague's freedom to participate in the normal collegial governance of the University. A faculty member reported this case of discrimination to a campus Equity and Human Rights (EQHR) officer. They also mentioned their discomfort with the anti-Israel encampment on campus. The officer dismissed this concern, saying that the encampment was just like the Vietnam War protests. When the person disagreed, the EQHR officer became increasingly confrontational, and the meeting ended in a strained atmosphere. This colleague had assumed that EQHR would offer moral support to help them cope with a stressful situation. That was when they first became aware that campus equity offices do not treat antisemitism like other kinds of prejudice.
- Dr. Daniel Drucker, world renown endocrinologist and faculty member at University of Toronto had a prestigious lecture summarily cancelled at the University of Ottawa simply because two students felt unsafe because he is a Zionist (i.e., believes like the vast majority of Canadian Jews that the Jewish people have a right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland) see: https://www.thestar.com/politics/this-toronto-scientist-could-one-day-win-the-nobel-prize-how-does-boycotting-him-help/article_a921a4ee-3ae4-11ef-991d-3b534a5897f4.html
- Since 2019, Prof. Brian Rubineau has taught a class that compares the startup ecosystems of Canada and Israel. The class partners with Hebrew University. Since Oct. 7, 2023, he and his co-instructor have been targeted with harassment, disruptions, and protests because of our class and partnership. The disruptions have affected the ability of colleague at the McGill Desautels School of Management to teach their classes.
<https://www.montrealgazette.com/news/article131044.html>
<https://www.montrealgazette.com/news/article853419.html>
- A faculty member in Religious Studies who has taught a course on religious pilgrimages for many years. Although she usually begins her course with a discussion of Jerusalem, this year she removed content related to Israel from her syllabus for fear of protests and backlash from students and protesters. This

demonstrates how scholars who teach topics relating to Israel are having our academic freedom stifled through intimidation, harassment, and other illegal and policy-violating behaviors.

- A scholar was planning to apply for a job at Concordia's Applied AI Institute for a job titled "Responsible AI Specialist" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20250123122711/https://www.concordia.ca/research/applied-ai-institute/why-ai/job-opportunities/responsible-ai-specialist.html>). However, this institute has issued a "global" report (<https://girai-report-2024-corrected-edition.tiiny.site/Global-Index-on-Responsible-AI-2024-Corrected-Edition.pdf>) covering 138 countries, but excluded Israel. Not only is this a disservice to the readers of the report since Israel is one of, if not the, world leader in this field, especially in medicine (see: <https://responsible-ai.tau.ac.il>, for example), but Concordia's Applied AI Institute misused funding from the Canadian Government to exclude the existence of the Jewish state. Can an Israeli scholar really expect to be a competitive candidate? Would such a person be able to work in an environment that engages in erasive antisemitism?
- Colleagues at a Canadian university organized a panel about Turtle Island, Palestine, and Sudan. An academic suggested inviting several speakers including Simon Deng, a Sudanese freed slave whose village was burned by extremists, Harry Laforme, the Mississauga of the Credit First Nation's Chief who wrote an open letter about how encampments abuse land treaties, and an Israeli - to balance the biased panel, from an academic perspective. The proposal was dismissed without discussion. A senior colleague later advised the academic to "read the room" if to avoid harming the chances on career advancement. Since that time, the scholar has been excluded from any similar discussions.
- An academic was invited to participate in an inter-university project. Several senior participants explicitly stated that they felt "uncomfortable collaborating with a Zionist" based solely on the academic's Jewish name and the project went on without the academic.
- The University of Manitoba Institute for the Humanities (UMIH) has been involved in a number of pro-Palestine activities (including participating in rallies). A faculty member reached out to the Acting Director in fall 2024 to discuss the single viewpoint of the institute on the issue of Israel-Palestine and to consider alternative viewpoints from a scholarly perspective. The Acting Director agreed that there was a particular political slant to the organization's activities and said she would welcome proposals of event that would offer alternative viewpoint. The faculty member proposed a well-respected speaker with academic credentials, to

discuss the IHRA Handbook. Initially the Director appeared positive about the idea but then came back and said that she had consulted the board and could not go forward because of the “likelihood of controversy and the potential boycotting of UMIH’s programming in the wake of such an event” [direct quote].

- Students for Justice in Palestine at Carleton University calling for students to submit a list of professors teaching “Zionist” narratives with the stated goal of removing Zionists from campus.
- A professor at the University of Ottawa who has been regularly targeted online for calling out antisemitism with mentions that he is “genocidal.” The personal attacks raise safety fears that carries over into the classroom and law school building. The professor has concerns about the security within my own institution and have been forced to hold classes in undisclosed locations for fear that there may be attempts to disrupt his classes.
- Prof. Michael Geist, a Canada Research Chair and law professor at the University of Ottawa has been regularly targeted online for calling out antisemitism with mentions that he is “genocidal.” The personal attacks raise safety fears that carry over into the classroom and law school building. Professor Geist has concerns about the security within his own institution and has been forced to hold classes in undisclosed locations for fear that there may be attempts to disrupt his classes.
- On November 2, 2023, a postdoctoral fellow led a university workshop on antisemitism co-sponsored by Brock’s Human Rights & Equity (HRE) office. On September 20th, the workshop was “approved” by the HRE leadership. The postdoc was told they had academic freedom to address antizionism but had to frame it in a way that everyone would feel comfortable. When the postdoc referenced the October 7 massacre at the workshop, students disrupted the session, and a staff member yelled at the postdoc for “presenting one side.” The postdoc was later reprimanded by senior administration for including those slides, despite earlier approval, and excluded from further antisemitism trainings with HRE. The student newspaper distorted the presentation and what occurred, and publicly labeled the postdoc “Islamophobic,” compounding the chilling effect.

<https://brockpress.com/islamophobic-anti-palestinian-propaganda-used-in-antisemitism-workshop-by-chabad-at-brock-palestinian-attendee-told-south-gazan-relatives-killed-by-israeli-forces-because-they-stayed-there/>