

January 31, 2017

Submission by Independent Jewish Voices Canada to the Anti-Racism Directorate

[Independent Jewish Voices Canada](#) (IJV) is a national human rights organization that promotes a just peace in Israel and Palestine based on the application of international law. We represent progressive Jews in Canada who are deeply concerned with the Israeli state's ongoing human rights violations. We are troubled by Israel lobby groups in Canada which falsely portray themselves as being representative of a vastly diverse Jewish community, while having no democratic foundation or accountability to community members.

The Anti-Racism Directorate (ARD) should not consider the [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions \(BDS\) movement](#) as falling under its mandate, since BDS is in no way racist (in fact, it is based entirely on the principles of anti-racism), and in no way signifies systemic racism in Ontario. The presence of the BDS movement in Ontario could not possibly signify systemic racism emanating from the Ontario government or any governmental institutions' treatment of Ontario residents, since neither the Ontario government nor any governmental institution participates in the BDS movement. We are confused, therefore, as to why the Ontario government has made repeated references to the ARD when questioned about its handling of the BDS movement.

IJV is very concerned about the following issues pertaining to our organizational mandate, which we feel must be addressed by the ARD:

- 1) The recurrent exclusion of Palestinian, dissenting Jewish, and other human rights-supporting voices by the Ontario government, and repeated defamation and intimidation towards these communities by the Ontario government;
- 2) The adoption of a discredited and ultimately discriminatory definition of *antisemitism* by the Ontario government.

1) The recurrent exclusion of Palestinian, dissenting Jewish and other human rights-supporting voices by the Ontario government, and repeated defamation and intimidation towards these communities by the Ontario government:

Palestinian residents of Ontario and supporters of Palestinians' human rights in Ontario—including many Jewish Ontarians—have been resolutely excluded from taking part in discussions and consultations with the Ontario government about the Ontario government's relationship with the State of Israel, Palestinians' human rights, and the Ontario government's position on the BDS movement.

On May 5, 2015, IJV, along with Palestine House and a few other organizations in Ontario that support Palestinians' human rights, delivered a hard copy letter to the

office of Premier Kathleen Wynne (see Appendix A for the text of the letter). The letter expressed strong concerns with Ms. Wynne's acceptance of an award from the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), an organization that proudly supports the laws and policies of the Israeli state. Many of these laws and policies run counter to [official Canadian policy](#) and are inconsistent with both international law, and the anti-racist values that the Ontario government consistently claims to uphold.

IJV, Palestine House and the other organizations requested a meeting with Ms. Wynne to discuss concerns about her acceptance of an award from CIJA. Despite the legitimate concerns of an important organization for the Palestinian community in Ontario, expressed alongside a national Jewish organization and other human rights-supporting groups, we were never granted a meeting from Ms. Wynne.

Ms. Wynne, instead, accepted the award from CIJA, and announced a mission to Israel and the occupied West Bank, upon the invitation of the Israel lobby group. It is greatly concerning that not only did Ms. Wynne accept the award from an Israel lobby group, but she refused to engage with the voices of Palestinian Ontarians, dissenting Jewish Ontarians, and other human rights-supporting Ontarians in this decision.

This, sadly, appears to be the way in which this government engages around the issue of Israel, Palestinians' human rights, and the BDS movement. The Ontario government has recurrently excluded Palestinians, dissenting Jewish and other human-rights-supporting voices from governmental decision-making on these issues.

IJV led an initiative to garner support from Ontario civil society organizations to oppose any initiative that defamed and tried to intimidate Palestinian human rights advocates. [Over 70 organizations signed an open letter](#) to members of the Ontario Legislature in September 2016. This letter was also sent to each member of provincial parliament.

On November 1, 2016, a month before the Legislative Assembly of Ontario (LAO) debated motion 36 on the BDS movement, IJV, Canadian Arab Federation and several other human rights-supporting organizations requested a meeting with Ms. Wynne to discuss the widespread support for a cessation of any governmental initiative that sought to intimidate Palestinian human rights advocates in the province (see Appendix B). This request for a meeting, which specified that a meeting be held during the month of November, went ignored by Ms. Wynne leading up to the motion's debate in the LAO on December 1, 2016.

On December 16, 2016, a follow-up letter was sent from the same organizations, reiterating our request for a meeting (see Appendix C).

On January 20, 2017, nearly twelve weeks after initially contacting Ms. Wynne with a request for a meeting, IJV (but none of the other organizations that signed onto the

email in Appendix B and Appendix C) received a response from Ms. Wynne (see Appendix D), which appears to reject a request for a meeting. The language in the email response is both confusing and contradictory, but what is clear is that Ms. Wynne accuses IJV—through our support of the BDS movement—of “attempting to divide our society.” Ms. Wynne also suggests that IJV and other proponents of the BDS movement are boycotting her “Jewish friends”, and that we “spread hatred and fear under the guise of free speech.” These are baseless and defamatory allegations.

On December 1, 2016, MPP Gila Martow introduced motion 36 to the LAO, in which she stated in the [debate](#): “We would not be here supporting a Ku Klux Klan on our campuses, so why are we allowing BDS movements and other anti-Jewish communities and anti-Israel organizations to have demonstrations and use our campuses, which are taxpayer-funded? It’s a PR battle, Madam Speaker.”

Rather than denouncing Ms. Martow’s words, several members of the government’s cabinet expressed fervent support for Ms. Martow’s initiative. It is defamatory to equate students on university campuses—who are strongly concerned about Israel’s human rights violations—with the Ku Klux Klan. This should be obvious to anyone who looks honestly at what BDS activists advocate for.

The reality is that many students who support BDS on campus are in fact Palestinian Ontarians, and a growing number of Jewish students also support and engage in BDS campaigns on Ontario campuses. Not a single member of the LAO condemned Ms. Martow’s equation of these students with members of the Ku Klux Klan. This language is incendiary and defamatory.

Several ministers in the Ontario government echoed Ms. Martow’s sentiments in the debate. The Honourable Steven del Duca—who even [participated](#) in the Israel lobby group’s press conference promoting the motion— stated that “We need to draw the line collectively in this chamber and beyond and send a very clear message that ... to confuse the notion of free speech with what the BDS movement propagates is inappropriate. That’s why, not only as an individual but as a minister and also as the member of provincial Parliament in Vaughan, I am very proud to support this particular motion.” It appears Mr. del Duca believes that supporting the human rights of Palestinians under international law (as “propagated” by the BDS movement) does not constitute lawful (free) speech in Ontario.

The Honourable Michael Coteau of the ARD stated that “I think it’s important for us ... to continue to build on the goodwill that we have with the State of Israel and continue to build a positive environment here in Ontario that does not tolerate any form of hate and discrimination.” It appears that Mr. Coteau is suggesting that the BDS movement constitutes both “hate” and “discrimination”.

The Honourable Glen Murray stated “I want to commend the member from Thornhill for this motion. It is a good motion and deserves support of all members in

this House.... It's important that we never, ever, ever back away from our commitment to Israel."

In the Ontario government's "commitment to Israel", it appears to have entirely disregarded the narrative and voices of Palestinians, both in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and in Ontario. This signifies systemic racism towards Palestinian residents of Ontario, as the Ontario government's recurrent behaviour points to a deliberate exclusion of these voices and narratives from government positions and policies regarding this issue.

The Ontario government has only consulted with and considered one stakeholder—the hyper-Zionist segment of the Jewish community—in determining government policies and positions on these issues. This signifies systemic racism towards Palestinian residents of Ontario.

The Ontario government, through the ARD, is mandated to "promote fair practices and policies that lead to racial equity." We expect, therefore, that the Ontario government will begin consulting with all stakeholders on this issue, not only those who have the most resources to lobby and fund trips for MPPs to the region.

The ARD is also mandated to "collaborate with the community". We therefore expect the ARD to collaborate with Palestinian organizations in Ontario, dissenting Jewish organizations such as IJV, and other human rights-supporting organizations that may support the BDS movement.

Recommendations:

- The ARD should investigate allegations made by Israel lobby groups about the BDS movement, and in doing so consult with the movement's leaders and founders in the Occupied Palestinian Territories who have put out the call for BDS in 2005 from over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations;
- The ARD should require the Ontario government to consult with Palestinian residents of Ontario on an ongoing basis, and to listen to a diversity of stakeholders on issues pertaining to Israel, Palestinians' human rights, and BDS.

2) The adoption of a discredited and ultimately discriminatory definition of antisemitism by the Ontario government:

The Ontario government passed motion 36 on December 1, 2016, which expressed support for the *Ottawa Protocol on Combatting Antisemitism*. This protocol employs a discredited definition of antisemitism that suggests that criticizing the political ideology of Zionism is a form of Jew-hatred. We strongly believe that this highly controversial definition of antisemitism is discriminatory to both Palestinian Ontarians and many Jewish Ontarians.

The Ottawa Protocol states that “We reaffirm the EUMC – now Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) – working definition of antisemitism” which believes that “antisemitism manifests itself with regard to the State of Israel...” through “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.” This highly deceptive wording denies Palestinians their own narrative and voice by stating that it is both hateful and racist for Palestinians to oppose the establishment of the State of Israel—which came about through the dispossession of their homeland and erasure of their civilization. This is what the creation of the State of Israel has meant for millions of Palestinians, including thousands of Palestinian residents of Ontario.

Israel lobby groups frequently claim that those who challenge the laws and policies that privilege Jews over Palestinians in the areas under Israel’s control are denying Israel’s “right to exist” or are seeking Israel’s “destruction”. They also accuse anyone who criticizes Israel publicly of “singling Israel out”, even if they have criticized numerous other countries. Unsurprisingly, the Ottawa Protocol states the following:

“Let it be clear: Criticism of Israel is not antisemitic, and saying so is wrong. But singling Israel out for selective condemnation and opprobrium – let alone denying its right to exist or seeking its destruction – is discriminatory and hateful, and not saying so is dishonest.”

By trying to set limits on how one is allowed to criticize Israel’s laws and policies—while remaining entirely unclear about where these lines are actually drawn—the Ottawa Protocol equates criticism of political Zionism and of any unknown number of Israeli laws and policies as constituting forms of Jew-hatred. This is highly discriminatory towards Palestinian residents of Ontario.

Furthermore, it is discriminatory towards many Jewish residents of Ontario, who wish not to be conflated with the Israeli state, and consider this conflation to be a form of antisemitism. As the Israeli NGO *Boycott from Within*—comprised of Jewish-Israeli activists—wrote in a [statement](#) to Ontario MPPs: “...the so-called Ottawa Protocol on Combatting Antisemitism, which the motion endorses, is an exceptionally deceptive, repressive and offensive document which should be rejected. Most glaringly, the protocol includes the opposition to the political ideology of Zionism in its definition of antisemitism. By doing that the protocol identifies Jews everywhere with the state of Israel--a position that the very same protocol (rightly this time) condemns as antisemitic.”

IJV finds it greatly disturbing that Liberal MPP Michael Colle engaged in this precise example of antisemitism during the debate in the LAO, when he stated:

We have to be consistent when we talk about tolerance. So in this motion, which I support, it really talks about the essence of Judaism, and the essence of Judaism is that they are in Israel because no one else would take them.

Canada would not take Jews. The United States would not take Jews. They had to fight to go back to their land of Abraham, and they've been fighting ever since. They only make up 1.5% of all the landmass of the Middle East, yet they are under constant attack from ISIS, from Iran—always under attack. That's why you can't separate the Jewish people from the Jewish nation. They say, "Well, it's all right to criticize Israel but you can be nice to Jews." I say hogwash. You can't separate the two. Just like you can't separate tolerance for homosexuals and gays and tolerance for everybody else. You've got to be consistent when you talk about tolerance. Here, BDS tries to manoeuvre this idea that, "We're just against Israel. We're not against the people." Hogwash. The BDS is an insidious attack on Jewish people.

The idea that criticizing Israel is the same as criticizing Jews is not only defamatory against those who criticize Israel, but it conflates all Jews around the world with the Israeli state, thereby further endangering Jews, and ignoring the hundreds of thousands of non- and anti-Zionist Jews around the world. This is the textbook definition of antisemitism, and not a single MPP challenged Mr. Colle's propagation of this antisemitic statement.

Antisemitism absolutely does exist in Ontario, and the ARD must have a proper definition of antisemitism in determining how best to oppose real antisemitism in the province. By adopting the Ottawa Protocol, the Ontario government is embracing the EUMC working definition on antisemitism, which has been widely discredited. It was [abandoned by the EU](#) years ago, so it is odd that it has been recently embraced by the Ontario government.

Recommendations:

- The ARD must refrain from using the EUMC working definition on antisemitism;
- The ARD must consult with a diversity of Jewish organizations, including IJV, on determining its definition of antisemitism so that it can be best equipped to combat actual instances of antisemitism in the province;
- Under no circumstances should criticism of the Israeli state be deemed an instance of anti-Jewish racism, or antisemitism, by the ARD.

Sincerely,

Tyler Levitan
Campaigns Coordinator, Independent Jewish Voices Canada
tyler@ijvcanada.org

Appendix A:

Kathleen Wynne, Premier
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

May 5, 2015

Dear Premier Kathleen Wynne,

We are writing to you as citizens of Ontario, active around issues of justice and peace in the Middle East. We have grave concerns regarding the award you are receiving at the upcoming Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) *Words and Deeds Leadership Award Dinner* on Monday, June 22 at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel in Toronto. We strongly feel that by accepting this award, you contravene the stated principles that led the people of Ontario to elect you as their Premier.

While we agree that your skills as a leader are formidable, we are surprised that given your commitment to diversity and fairness, and your consistent acknowledgment of Indigenous rights, you would agree to accept an award from an organization that openly supports policies denying the human rights of the indigenous Palestinian people, many of whom live and vote in the province of Ontario. In addition, accepting this award ignores the many thousands of Jews in this province whose views and loyalties are not represented by CIJA's extreme Zionist agenda.

CIJA describes itself on its website as a “non-partisan organization creating and implementing strategies to improve the quality of Jewish life in Canada and abroad, increase support for Israel, and strengthen the Canada-Israel relationship” [1]. Two of the three ways in which CIJA describes itself are revealing. It appears that the organization prioritizes its promotion of the Israeli state in Canada. It is, in essence, a lobby group for the Israeli government. Moreover, CIJA promotes the idea that critics of the Israeli state are “anti-Semites” [2] in an effort to falsely equate criticism of Israel’s unjust laws and policies with a hatred of Jews. Given growing criticism of Israel’s apartheid-like treatment of the Palestinians under its sovereign control [3], we believe it is unseemly for the Premier of Ontario to accept this award from an organization dedicated to uncritically supporting a government that engages in such behaviour [4].

CIJA also portrays itself as the single representative voice of Canadian Jews, a claim that has been vigorously challenged [5]. CIJA’s Board of Directors and spokespeople are not elected and are in no way accountable to the diverse Jewish communities in Canada. The only qualification for being appointed to CIJA’s Board of Directors appears to be an unquestioning support for the Israeli government [6].

In a recent column in the *Ottawa Citizen*, Carleton University Professor Andrew Cohen commented that “CIJA seems congenitally unable to utter a discouraging word about Stephen Harper, Benjamin Netanyahu or the State of Israel – while allowing Canadians to think its view reflects a consensus among Canadian Jews. It does not” [7]. In fact, its claim of non-partisanship is dubious, according to Cohen, since CIJA’s positions have become so intertwined with those of the Conservative government, it is nearly impossible to differentiate between the two.

CIJA claims on its website that it advocates for “freedom, human rights, social justice, and support for the People and the Land of Israel” [8]. However, its terminology indicates no recognition that this land is home to Jews, Palestinians, Druze and many migrant workers without status. It is telling that CIJA uses a biblical lexicon to describe the region encompassing present-day Israel and Palestine. “The Land of Israel” is the biblical term for the ancient kingdom of the Hebrews, which encompassed all of the West Bank and Gaza.

Furthermore, CIJA’s website makes prominent use of the biblical term “Judea and Samaria” to describe the occupied West Bank [9]. This is the term used by those who consider the West Bank to belong exclusively to Jews by virtue of a God-given decree. The claims of the Palestinian people who have lived on this land for hundreds of years, whose villages have been destroyed and whose houses have been bulldozed, are systematically ignored by CIJA. For whose human rights does CIJA advocate, and which people in “the Land of Israel” deserve freedom, social justice and support?

CIJA also supports policies that directly contravene Canada’s official positions. For example, CIJA appears to consider the Jordan Valley—located deep in the occupied West Bank—to be an integral part of the State of Israel [10]. CEO Shimon Fogel responded to the United Church’s charge that Israel’s illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank are a root cause of ongoing conflict, by stating that “The root cause is not Israel’s presence but the rejection of Israel’s presence in the territories” [11]. Unlike CIJA, Canada sees Israel’s attempt to establish a permanent presence in the territories as illegal [12].

Meanwhile, CIJA refuses to acknowledge many Jewish voices that are critical of Israel’s unjust laws and policies towards the Palestinians, and rejects the idea that these Jews have any place in the broader Canadian Jewish community [13]. Surely this position contravenes your own stand on the importance of diversity in our province.

By accepting an award from CIJA, you would be sending a message to Ontarians that you find CIJA’s behaviour acceptable. It is far from acceptable for CIJA to claim to act on behalf of Canadian Jews without any semblance of accountability, while denying a voice to many Jews who diverge from their political views. It is far from acceptable for CIJA to uncritically support the behaviour of the Israeli government and military against Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and within its borders — behaviour which human rights experts around the world have repeatedly identified as

criminal. For the sake of a just and lasting peace in Israel and Palestine, acknowledging the diversity of opinions among Jews and other residents of Ontario that differ from CIJA's, we urge you to please refuse this dubious "honour".

We request a meeting in person with you in the next 2 weeks to discuss our concerns, and offer any further information you might need to make an informed choice around CIJA's agenda.

Many thanks for your time and attention on this matter,

Concerned citizens of Ontario representing Independent Jewish Voices – Canada
Dykes and Trans People for Palestine
Palestine House
Women in Solidarity with Palestine

Notes:

- [1] See "About us" at bottom of each page of their website: <http://www.cija.ca/>
- [2] See <http://bit.ly/1Inf5T4> and <http://bit.ly/1Gw2GHM>
- [3] See <http://bit.ly/1ODROkH> and <http://bit.ly/1JAEKsW>
- [4] See <http://bit.ly/1EoFrRy>
- [5] See <http://bit.ly/1Agd30j>, <http://bit.ly/1PXXmE5> and <http://bit.ly/1beoa38>
- [6] See <http://huff.to/1ww3Z6y>
- [7] See <http://bit.ly/1BrmRne>
- [8] See <http://www.cija.ca/about-us/>
- [9] See <http://bit.ly/1DBiF5a> and <http://bit.ly/1J8MRJX>
- [10] See <http://bit.ly/1HZHobf>, and the link they provide to the Israeli Foreign Ministry's website, which shows all of the West Bank and Gaza as part of the "Land of Israel".
- [11] See <http://bit.ly/1GFIRl8>
- [12] See <http://bit.ly/1hpfgxN>
- [13] See <http://bit.ly/1AgefR4> and <http://bit.ly/1IngGIB>

Appendix B:

November 1, 2016

Dear Premier Wynne,

With [70 organizations](#) signing an Open Letter to members of the Ontario legislature, it should be clear to you that there is much concern across Ontario's and Canada's civil society about the possible reintroduction of legislation, motions or other tactics to vilify and create a muzzling environment for activists involved in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

The demands of the Palestinian civil society-led BDS movement are consistent with [Canada's official policy](#): ending Israel's occupation and removing the separation barrier from occupied territory; ending institutional discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel; and recognizing the rights of Palestinian refugees under UN resolution 194. As such, we would ask for an hour to discuss our urgent and critical concerns, as well as to try to understand your approach with regard to the Ontario government's seemingly unquestioning support of Israel.

Given your statement in the legislature on June 2 indicating that you would work towards a motion condemning BDS, we trust you will be prepared to meet with those of us who have indicated our deep desire that Ontario respect civil liberties, human rights, international humanitarian law and democracy, and who simply cannot reconcile this with your comments and actions.

Despite past requests to meet with you, for example related to your attendance (and acceptance of honours) at the CIJA Words and Deeds gala, and in relation to your envoy to Israel having been ignored, we trust that this will not be the case with this request. We hope your desire to be a conciliatory leader will prevail, and you will welcome open communication.

As such, we request a meeting with you in order for a delegation of up to six people from the undersigned organizations to speak with you. We request for this meeting to happen during November.

Given your openness towards meeting with certain Jewish organizations, we would expect you to meet with Independent Jewish Voices Canada, as well, and with other community organizations concerned about this issue and the protection of our civil liberties.

Sincerely,

Independent Jewish Voices Canada
Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East
Canadian Arab Federation
Faculty for Palestine
Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid - Toronto

Appendix C:

December 16, 2016

Dear Premier Wynne,

It has been over a month and a half since the email below was sent on behalf of five organizations in Ontario. We have yet to receive a response from the Premier's office.

We are deeply disturbed and concerned by the motion opposing the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement that passed in the Ontario Legislature with the support of the Liberal government. We feel that the motion will not only create a chill on freedom of expression in the province, but that it in fact discriminates against Ontarians of Palestinian descent by labeling Palestinian non-violent resistance as hateful and bigoted, and denying the Palestinians their own narrative and voice.

The motion's endorsement of the Ottawa Protocol on Combating Antisemitism is also insulting towards many Jews in Ontario who oppose the conflation of Judaism with the State of Israel, and consider this conflation as inherently antisemitic. It is absolutely not antisemitic to oppose and challenge Israel's historical and ongoing dispossession of Palestinians, which can include rejecting Israel's existence as a state that institutionally discriminates against non-Jews. Israel was founded on the forced displacement of the native peoples living off the land, much like Canada was. While Canada has begun to come to terms with our history through initiatives such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Israel and its lobby groups abroad strongly oppose and seek to silence any narrative that speaks the truth regarding the catastrophic consequences of Israel's creation for the Palestinians, and how the process of dispossessing Palestinians has continued for nearly seventy years.

We are extremely troubled by the fact that the Anti-Racism Directorate-- which has been tasked with a noble mission-- is now being pointed to as a solution for opposing the BDS movement. The BDS movement is not at all bigoted or hateful. The BDS movement is based on principles of anti-racism and international law. What the BDS movement opposes and seeks to address is the racism and bigotry which underlies the Israeli government's violent and criminal actions against Palestinians.

We would like to reiterate our strong and urgent interest in meeting with you to discuss our concerns. A democracy is supposed to enable differing and opposing voices to be heard. It appears that the Ontario government is only interested in hearing and considering one set of voices -- the voices which seek to silence the truth about Israel's behaviour, and which only represents one segment of the population of Ontario. Systematically refusing to hear voices from the Arab, Jewish and human rights communities of Ontario does not bode well for the state of our democracy.

We look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Sincerely,

representatives from:

Independent Jewish Voices Canada

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East

Canadian Arab Federation

Faculty for Palestine

Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid - Toronto

Appendix D:

Dear Mr. Levitan:

Thank you for taking the time to send your email on behalf of Independent Jewish Voices Canada regarding the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. I welcome this opportunity to hear your views on the issue.

I want to assure you that my colleagues in the Ontario government and I condemn all forms of hatred, prejudice and racism, including anti-Semitism, homophobia, anti-Sikhism and Islamophobia.

Our government does not support the BDS movement, or any other positions or movements that attempt to divide our society. We believe that open, constructive dialogue and co-operation will lead to the much-desired just peace in the Middle East. Peace emerges from building bridges, collaboration, openness and understanding - not the opposite.

Ontario supports the State of Israel as a strong ally, friend and economic partner. Our two jurisdictions have enjoyed a steady level of trade for many years, and Israel will continue to be a priority market for Ontario in both trade and research. As you may know, I led a successful business mission to Israel and the West Bank in May 2016 to further strengthen our relationship with the Israeli and Palestinian populations and their representatives, and to expand our economic ties.

Our government also supports the right of individuals and groups to freely express their views, without fear of discrimination or persecution, whether in Ontario or in the Middle East. Freedom of speech is something that all Canadians value and that we must vigorously defend. We must be able to have a respectful dialogue with our friends, with whom we disagree that boycotting Israel and our Jewish friends is the real solution. We must be able to properly identify anti-Semitism and separate it from legitimate discourse on how we come to a peaceful solution in the region.

However, we oppose those who spread hatred and fear under the guise of free speech. Our government takes allegations of hate crime very seriously. Comments and actions that promote hate are deeply offensive and will not be tolerated in our society. There are laws in place that deal with hate crimes, such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the many sections of the Criminal Code.

Through the Anti-Racism Directorate, our government is working to address and prevent systemic racism in all forms across government policy, programs and services, and increase anti-racism education and awareness in all parts of the province.

By working together as a society to build opportunities and remove barriers, we can

make progress toward ensuring Ontario is a place where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed and where everyone can live feeling safe and free from discrimination.

As your correspondence will also interest my colleague the Honourable Michael Coteau, Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism, I have forwarded a copy to him for his information. I trust that Minister Coteau will also take your comments into careful consideration.

Once again, thank you for writing. Please accept my best wishes.

Kathleen Wynne
Premier of Ontario

c: The Honourable Michael Coteau