



April 2019

To: City of Toronto Executive Committee,

Re: Proposed motion on “Hate-sponsored rallies such as Al-Quds Day”

On behalf of the University of Toronto’s Graduate Students Union’s Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions Committee (UTGSU BDS) and the University of Toronto’s Ontario Public Interest Research Group’s Students Against Israeli Apartheid (UofT SAIA), we express our opposition to the silencing of the Al-Quds Rally with the proposed motion on “Hate-sponsored rallies such as Al-Quds Day” being considered at May 1, 2019 meeting. This motion violates the fundamental rights of the Al-Quds Rally organizers and, therefore, of all Canadian society to freedom of speech and expression, and the right of political dissent and public assembly. These rights, guaranteed and protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms as well as international laws and conventions, apply to the efforts of Al-Quds organizers. These human rights advocates are exposing the Israeli state’s violations of international law in its treatment of the Palestinian people under its rule, including the convention against the crime of apartheid. As students and community members, we are deeply troubled by the City of Toronto’s targeting of the Al-Quds Rally for suppression, and consider the proposed motion a clear violation of freedom of speech. We urge the City of Toronto to uphold and respect our fundamental freedoms and rights by quashing this motion.

As students at the University of Toronto, we understand well the value of freedom of assembly and expression for the creation of new ideas and innovation. These basic democratic principles are the prerequisite to the ability of any university or academic institution to operate and flourish. In a city like Toronto, with many schools, colleges, and universities, and a vibrant cultural life, it is particularly important that an open, democratic culture is promoted, and no social or political perspective is criminalized. The proposed motion is misguided: it censorship of important human rights work like the Al Quds Rally and the criticism of government policies like those of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territories sets a dangerous precedent that contravenes the values of inclusivity and diversity that the City of Toronto has expressed its commitment to.

Marking criticism of Israel as constituting hate speech is misinformed and unconstitutional. It is undemocratic and suppresses important human rights work. The state of Israel is currently in breach of over 70 UN Security Council resolutions directly involving human rights violations in relation to its treatment of the Palestinian population and its illegal occupation of Palestinian land.¹ Countless United Nations and human rights reports, like the Al Quds Rally, have exposed the systematic violation of the basic human rights of the Palestinians by the Israeli state. Recently, for example, the United Nations Human Rights Council noted in its report on Israel’s violence against the Great March of Return in Gaza that, “Israeli forces intentionally shot children, they have intentionally shot people with disabilities, they have intentionally shot journalists.”² It is deeply troubling that our elected officials are suppressing peaceful demonstrations such as the Al-Quds Rally that call attention to such gross violations of international law and human rights. Too often the Palestinian perspective is silenced and marginalized, but it is more important than ever that we listen and hear the perspective of a people who have been living and suffering under colonialism for almost a century now.

Again, we urge you to affirm the right of the rally organizers and supporters by quashing the proposed motion before you. In doing so, the City would be upholding basic democratic principles, including freedom of speech and the right to peaceful demonstrations.

Sincerely,

Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions Committee, Graduate Student Union, University of Toronto
Students Against Israeli Apartheid, Ontario Public Interest Research Group, University of Toronto

¹ Hammond, J. (2010). Rogue State: Israeli Violations of U.N. Security Council Resolutions. *Foreign Policy Journal*. <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/01/27/rogue-state-israeli-violations-of-u-n-security-council-resolutions/>; CBC (2019). UN Human Rights Council condemns use of 'excessive force' by Israel at Gaza, *CBC* border.<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/unhrc-report-gaza-israel-border-1.5067280>

² UNHCR (2019). No Justification for Israel to Shoot Protesters with Live Ammunition. *OHCHR* <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=24226&LangID=E>; Murphy, M.C (2019). UN investigators call for arrests over Gaza war crimes. *Electronic Intifada*. <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/maureen-clare-murphy/un-investigators-call-arrests-over-gaza-war-crimes>