

SAFETY FOR WHOM?



Struggling Locals Harassed and Beaten by Security Staff at Union Station in Preparation for FIFA

Published May 26, 2026

Prepared by the Toronto Underhoused and Homeless Union (TUHU)

DISPLACEMENT IN THE NAME OF THE WORLD CUP

Over the last 2 months, members of the Toronto Underhoused and Homeless Union (TUHU) interviewed ~50 people at Union Station who experience homelessness. We asked one consistent question: *Have you noticed an increase in security escalations at Union Station?* The answer was overwhelming. **~90% of respondents reported either witnessing security violence firsthand or experiencing escalation directly themselves.**



Respondents repeatedly described:

- Forced removals from public space,
- Verbal abuse and dehumanization,
- Physical assaults by security and police, and
- Increased targeting of visibly poor and homeless people ahead of FIFA - related city “cleanups”.

The results were clear: a pattern of displacement, intimidation, and violence directed towards Toronto’s most vulnerable residents.

PUBLIC SPACE FOR WHOM?

Again and again, people described experiencing being dehumanized and being targeted for simply existing. “They kicked me out into the rain and taunted me,” Respondent 11 recalled, describing constant humiliation and harassment.

Respondent 4 reported that security would walk by her when she was minding her own business, and call her a ‘piece of shit’ and ‘junkie’, attempting to provoke her.

And Respondent 9 shared that when she went into Shoppers Drug Mart, located in the Union concourse, to buy face cream, she was approached and taunted by security staff, accusing her of intent to steal. She said that this was embarrassing, since she wished to simply make a purchase like every other customer.

LASTING TRAUMA

Some respondents described severe physical assaults with lasting injuries. One example from Respondent 50, who explained that city outreach workers advised him to seek shelter at 129 Peter Street. He followed their directive, but on arrival he was turned away from the full shelter, and so he returned to Union Station for a dry place to survive. There, security confronted him in the washroom and violently dragged him out with his pants down. According to Respondent 50, the injuries from the assault now make it difficult for him to walk. He continues to experience chronic and worsening pain.

Respondent 27 described a similar incident: “I was beaten by security for sleeping inside. I was at the GO Station washroom, and they dragged me through piss. I didn’t get a ticket. They didn’t want to leave any evidence.”

“I saw people being beaten with batons in the morning. To ‘clean up’ before the morning rush.”

-Respondent 42



EVADING ACCOUNTABILITY

We see a trend of increased violence in washrooms and enclosed spaces where there are few witnesses and no cameras. A damaged toilet stall door (pictured to the right) in the men’s washroom of Union GO Station appeared consistent with multiple accounts describing stall doors being kicked in by security while the stall was occupied. Respondent 46 shared, “They roughed me up in the washroom. They kicked down the stall door, pulled me out naked, and told me to leave.”

Additionally, Respondent 47, living with health conditions, explained that he requires additional time in washrooms. Rather than checking on his well-being verbally, security kicked in the stall door, dragged him outside, and left him on the street with his pants still undone.





DISPLACEMENT INCREASING

Respondents repeatedly connected the increase in enforcement to preparations for FIFA-related tourism. People described feeling pushed out of public spaces not because they posed a danger, but because their visibility was considered undesirable.

“Security looks at us and assumes the worst. We aren’t considered humans to them”

-Respondent 9

The first time we spoke to Respondent 22, he had initially reported only being asked to leave once. Two weeks later, he described a major escalation in aggressiveness by security: “Constables working for GO Express roughed me up in a washroom. I don’t like to use the washroom anymore.”

The stories collected by TUHU suggest a system where poor and unhoused people are increasingly treated as obstacles to be removed rather than residents deserving safety, dignity, and care.

WELL-ESTABLISHED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

What our members are experiencing at Union Station is not new. The United Nations documented this exact pattern fifteen years ago. In 2009, UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Raquel Rolnik presented a report to the Human Rights Council on mega-events and housing rights. Her findings read like a description of today’s Union Station.

She found that ahead of mega-events, authorities routinely remove people experiencing homelessness from areas visible to visitors through forced removal. Unhoused people are not being removed because they are dangerous. They are being removed because their presence conflicts with the image FIFA demands.

Rolnik documented that evictions carried out through violence, harassment, and assault are consistently justified by time pressure, representing a fundamental disregard for the rights of affected communities. Her recommendation was clear: states must prevent the criminalization of people experiencing homelessness during mega-events, ensure they are not removed from public spaces, and guarantee that enforcement operations fully respect human rights, including freedom from violence and harassment.

Canada is legally bound by these obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The City of Toronto cannot claim ignorance. What is happening at Union Station is a human rights violation the UN condemned over a decade ago.

LOVE THE SPORT, FIGHT THE IMPACT

As a union made up of homeless and underhoused people, we know what our communities need. Real safety does not come from displacement, intimidation, or brutality. We are tired of being treated as the problem, and having the 'solution' violently exercised against us.

OUR DEMANDS:

- 1. Immediate 24/7 respite spaces made available during World Cup preparations and during the ongoing World Cup events.**
 - Respite spaces should be safe, engaging, and resourced spaces, providing opportunities to receive compassionate support, learn, have fun, be creative, and rest.
- 2. Cancel security contracts,** and replace them with peer-support, harm reduction workers, and outreach teams who most fully embody a trauma-informed approach.
 - Aggressive enforcement and private, security-operated 'support' is not working. Allocate all budget funding away from security contracts and special enforcement, and towards seasoned and compassionate outreach groups.
 - SCS peer and harm reduction workers who have recently experienced job loss due to closures are excellent candidates for immediate outreach employment during FIFA (or at any time).
- 3. Indefinitely postpone shelter closures and SCS closures.**
 - Without a place to go, more and more people are going to be in places like Union Station. These ongoing closures are doing consistent harm to people and must be halted.

**IF YOU HAVE STORIES
YOU WANT TO SHARE, EMAIL US:
torontohomelessorganize@gmail.com**



NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US

People who have experienced homelessness demand authorship of our own goals and solutions; without this, any proposed solution is coercion.

The experiences documented in this report reveal a disturbing pattern of escalating violence against vulnerable people at Union Station. These are not isolated incidents. These are consistent testimonies from dozens of people describing fear, humiliation, physical assault, and forced displacement in one of the busiest public transit hubs in the country. This needs urgent attention and we need immediate solutions. We demand a city response rooted in dignity, housing, healthcare, and human rights.

Our full report will be available soon at our website: www.TUHUnion.ca