

The following statement was written by the Anti-Racism Working Group, a faculty-led initiative in the Toronto Metropolitan University Department of Sociology, and was approved at a meeting of the Sociology Departmental Council on April 2nd. The statement upholds the principles of our mission as a department, and is consistent with the work we do as scholars, professors, and researchers. The statement is made on behalf of the Department of Sociology, not Toronto Metropolitan University.

Statement on Academic Freedom and Critical Pedagogy in the Face of Global, National and Local Conflict

Preamble

The Department of Sociology claims a long history of critical pedagogy, research, and community activism, locally and internationally. We assist our students in understanding human behaviour, institutional practices, and systems of power from a critical historical and contemporary lens, with a focus on fundamental human rights and social justice. We examine all intersectional forms of racism and sexism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, ethnic cleansing and genocide¹, white supremacy and settler colonialism, Indigenous land occupation and dispossession, abuse of state power, and forms of economic and social inequalities in differing economic and political systems in the global order.

Context

The University, its administration, and all of its personnel have a responsibility to foster an institutional culture that encourages diversity of thought and constructive dissent. The Department of Sociology at Toronto Metropolitan University expresses its disappointment with University leadership for its [systemic silencing](#) of Palestinian and Arab students, staff, academics, and all allies.

Palestinian/Arab students, staff, faculty/instructors and their allies have faced significant harm at the hands of the institution and within the TMU community for addressing any level of antiracist and anticolonial perspectives, including harassment, doxxing, intimidation, censorship, threats to individual safety, and more.

For these reasons, the Department of Sociology wishes to publicly affirm students, staff and faculty/instructors' freedom to express their collective grief and resistance to the unprecedented destruction and punishment of the besieged Palestinian peoples of Gaza and the West Bank. We condemn the violent attacks of October 7 that claimed the lives of more than 1,200 Israelis. We wish to support all demands for immediate and permanent ceasefire, the restoration of humanitarian aid supplies and distribution in Gaza and the West Bank, and the return of all hostages.

Academic Freedom

The reprehensible level of Israeli destruction of educational institutions has resulted in the obliteration of all of the 12 universities in Gaza. These assaults, which constitute [educide](#)², [scholasticide](#)³, and [epistemicide](#)⁴, have devastating consequences on present and future

generations of Palestinians. This increased repression of academic freedom in the Global North is threatening the existence of academic scholarship, activism, and discourse. The Department of Sociology encourages the University to take a position of support that enables dialogue and debate around the ongoing war, genocide and apartheid in Gaza and the West Bank.

The **Canadian Association of University Teachers** (CAUT), an organization representing over 70,000 staff and scholars at 120 universities and colleges across Canada, is cognizant that academic freedom and critical pedagogy are vulnerable during periods of war, genocide, and social unrest ([CAUT, 2023](#)). For this reason, we wish to denounce all politically-motivated restrictions on academic expression.

- i. The Department supports the [October 2023 Toronto Metropolitan Faculty Association \(TFA\) motion](#) on defending Academic Freedom within our university to protect our faculty members in teaching, research, and activism. The faculty collective agreement contractually guarantees the right to search for truth, knowledge and understanding and to express freely what one believes. We support the same protections for our students and other employees at TMU.
- ii. The Department welcomes and supports the growing number of Academic Freedom statements and strategies from other Sociology Departments, faculty associations and national academic organizations across Canada. We also support their critical analysis of the current war and genocide on Gaza.
- iii. The Department supports the freedom of conscience and expression of all students, staff and faculty/instructors affiliated to our Department, and within the University, including their right to peaceful protest and civil disobedience.
- iv. The Department particularly supports the members of our Department, including students, who have experienced racist, sexist and political harassment in their classrooms, scholarship and participation in civil society.

Racism, Genocide and Apartheid

Violence between peoples does not exist in a vacuum. Between Israel and Palestine, there exists a long historical relationship that has led to the reactionary violence against Israel, the current [genocide](#) against Palestinian civilians, and deepening [apartheid](#) in Gaza and the West Bank.

- i. The Department condemns the October 7 violence against Israeli civilians, and the growth of anti-Semitism in Canada and in other countries. We mourn with those who lost their family members on this day, and in the ongoing assault on Gaza and the West Bank.
- ii. The Department further condemns the ongoing civilian genocide and manufactured famine in Palestine, the expansion of illegal settlements and ongoing apartheid practices

in Gaza and West-Bank, and the growth of anti-Palestinian/anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia in the Global North. We are devastated by the level of immeasurable loss, intergenerational trauma, and family breakdown experienced by Palestinian, Arab and Muslim members of the community and their allies. We condemn the 30,000+ deaths and counting, mainly of women and children, furthering the decimation of the civilian Palestinian population for present and future generations.

- iii. The recent forms and growth of anti-Palestinian/anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia are rooted in historical conditions of land annexation, and ongoing white supremacist settler-colonial occupation and expansion.
- iv. The Department believes that criticism of Zionism and Israeli State practices does not equate to anti-Semitism. Zionism does not support Palestinian self-determination. Individual Jews cannot be blamed for the actions taken by the Israeli government, simply because they are Jewish.

International Human Rights Laws and Institutions, and NGO's

The Department supports the international work of the United Nations, the International Criminal Court (ICC) on war crimes, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on genocide, to end the war, genocide, and the increasing death toll in Palestine. We especially support the leading role of South Africa and many nations of the Global South in addressing the case of genocide and apartheid at the ICJ, and in challenging the ongoing Israeli obliteration of Gaza infrastructure, food/aid distribution and health care, and the mass deaths of civilians under war, in violation of the Geneva Conventions.

We also support critical legislative debates framed by international human rights laws at the local, provincial, and federal levels calling for immediate and permanent ceasefire, return of all hostages, including unlawfully arrested Palestinian minors, activists and [political prisoners](#), that have not been given due political process, and humanitarian aid for Gaza and the West Bank.

Department of Sociology Commitments

The Department of Sociology wishes to recognize its own shortcomings in responding to and in supporting students, staff and faculty/instructors affected by the war on Gaza and the West Bank, or the hostility they received for their advocacy. We acknowledge that this statement is long overdue, and that our silence has caused irreversible damage to our colleagues and the students we serve.

Therefore, we commit to:

1. prioritize student voices by encouraging intra-and inter-departmental communication between students and faculty/instructors to facilitate trust and relationship-building, (e.g., Town Halls);
2. organize Department-sponsored efforts to initiate critical teachings and conversations, such as film and documentary screenings , to encourage recognition of “the Middle East,

settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and the intersectionality of power and oppression” ([UTSC HCS Palestine Solidarity Statement](#)).

Calls to Action

University-wide

Given the above, we call on all Departments, Faculties and Offices at Toronto Metropolitan University to commit to the following:

For immediate consideration:

- 3. Development of a Standing Task Force for Campus Anti-Arab Racism & Islamophobia**, including:
 - a. means for documenting incidents of anti-Arab racism and discrimination, Islamophobia, and xenophobia on campus, and their corresponding institutional response(s) (*see point 7*);
 - b. conducting funded research on strategies and best practices utilized in addressing the needs of Arab and Muslim students at TMU;
 - c. awareness-building on genocidal ignorance and apathy within student unions and other student-facing organizations, such as the Society of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities (SASSH) and the Toronto Metropolitan Student Union (TMSU) that commits them to their support of the student population.
- 4. Provide full transparency on Israeli investment, relations, and donor portfolios**, including:
 - a. a publicly available and comprehensive breakdown of all investments, including a list of donors and holdings in specific companies, industries, and funds;
 - b. the screening criteria and ethical guidelines used in investment and fundraising processes; and,
 - c. clarification on whether any investments contradict TMU's mission and values, particularly in relation to justice, internationalization, and decolonization.

For long-term consideration:

- 5. Reviewing all policies related to freedom of speech at the student, staff and faculty/instructor-level** (e.g., [Social Media Policy.docx](#)), including:
 - a. integrating safeguards for inclusive and democratic institutional processes on matters of departmental decision-making (e.g., issuing public statements).
- 6. Establishing interventions and protections for all Toronto Metropolitan University students, staff, and faculty/instructors**, including:
 - a. legal protections for students and unionized/non-unionized staff and faculty/instructors;
 - b. creation of programming and expansion of existing programming (e.g., [Tri-Mentoring Program](#)) to include community-centered spaces for interfaith and intercultural dialogue and debate between Arab, Muslim, Israeli and Jewish students;

- c. establishing specialized training, teach-ins, workshops, and manuals on sensitivity in times of grief, conflict de-escalation, and fostering civil discourse for all TMU students, staff and faculty/instructors, utilizing the expertise of qualified professionals.
7. **Reviewing the effectiveness of the mandate of the [Office of the Vice President, Equity, Diversity, and Community Inclusion](#) and of [Human Rights Services](#) at TMU,** to:
- a. ensure the support and protection of Palestinian, Arab, Israeli and Jewish students, staff, faculty/instructors on campus affected by escalating forms of discrimination.

Conclusion

Expanding our disciplinary and institutional commitments to decolonization demands actively addressing all forms of oppression against Indigenous peoples in the global world order, and their right to self-determination and sovereignty. Violence in Palestine is deeply intertwined with our broader global fight against settler colonialism, illegal occupation and dispossession, and systemic oppression.

We cannot be selective in our pursuit for justice.

Thank you for your consideration of this motion,

The Anti-Racism Working Group of the Sociology Departmental Council

Footnotes

¹**[Genocide](#)**: “Genocide is defined as any act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” (United Nations 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide).

²**[Educide](#)**: “the mass destruction of a country or region's educational infrastructure because of war, invasion, conflict, terrorism, or mass killings” (Rula Alousi, 2022). Educide includes but is not limited to, the intentional targeting and destruction of educational facilities, disciplines of study, educators, and students.

³**[Scholasticide](#)**: first coined by Karma Nabulsi. Nabulsi used the term to describe the “systematic destruction of Palestinian education by Israel” to counter a tradition of Palestinian learning.

⁴**Epistemicide**: coined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos to refer to the killing of knowledge systems.

University Statements on Academic Freedom and Conflict in Israel and Palestine

[International Sociological Association \(ISA\) Statement on the Situation in Israel and Palestine](#), Oct 19, 2023

[American Anthropological Association \(AAA\) The Resolution to Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions](#), July 24 2023

[Canadian Association of University Teachers \(CAUT\) Statement on Academic Freedom in Times of Conflict](#), Nov 2, 2023

[Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations \(OCUFA\) Statement: Ontario faculty say campus safety and academic freedom must be upheld during international conflicts](#), October 18, 2023

[Toronto Metropolitan Faculty Association \(TFA\) Bulletin](#), October 2023

[University of Toronto Department of Historical and Cultural Studies \(HSC\) Palestine Solidarity Statement](#), March 4, 2024

[University of Toronto Women & Gender Studies \(WGS\) Institute Statement of support for faculty speaking about Palestine/Israel](#), October 16, 2023

[The American Sociological Association \(ASA\) Statement on Academic Freedom in the Face of Global and National Crisis](#), Feb 12, 2024

[Sociologists for Justice in Palestine Motion for the ASA vote in Resolution for Justice in Palestine](#), Feb 26, 2024

Resources

[Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and Manifestations](#) (Arab Canadians Lawyers Association)

[The war in Gaza is wiping out Palestine's education and knowledge systems](#) (Desai, 2024)

[Unveiling the Chilly Climate: The Suppression of Speech on Palestine in Canada](#) (Nestel & Gaudet 2022)

[Students for Justice in Palestine](#) (SJP at TMU)

[Faculty for Palestine \(F4P\)](#)

[Independent Jewish Voices for Peace](#)

[Principles for Dismantling Antisemitism](#)