



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO EDUCATION WORKERS
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Executive Committee

November 28, 2019

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Dear President Rhonda Lenton,

On November 20, a solidarity action with the Palestinian people took place on the York University campus. The action was a peaceful counter-demonstration to a York University event hosting former Israeli Defense Force soldiers. Before the 20th, there was reason to believe that the counter-demonstration would be disrupted by the Jewish Defense League (JDL), a group widely condemned as a terrorist organization. Although York Security and Toronto Police were present on the 20th, they did not intervene to prevent a range of intimidating and violent actions by JDL members, including harassing Muslim students and attempting to remove their scarves, stealing and urinating on a Palestinian flag, and physically assaulting a student—then mocking that student as he was carried away in an ambulance.

These events have shocked the wider community. Members of Palestinian solidarity organizations, at York as well as at the University of Toronto, now have serious fears for their safety.

Although Israel-Palestine raises contentious political matters, the issue here is not about which side is right. The issue is that neither York Security nor Toronto Police Services took adequate steps to protect students, staff, and community members who were threatened, harassed, and physically assaulted by JDL members. Moreover, your public statement on the incident does not acknowledge that the intimidation and violence was carried out by members of the JDL against participants in the Palestinian solidarity event, not the other way around. Without this acknowledgement, your statement perpetuates the problematic and false narrative that there was bad behaviour on both sides.

CUPE 3902 calls on you to issue a clarification to your statement on the November 20th event, specifying that participants in the Palestinian solidarity action were the targets of violence and harassment, not the perpetrators of it. We also call on York University to take immediate steps to improve policies designed to protect students, staff, and community members involved in peaceful protests on your campus—including prohibiting known members of the JDL from attending campus events.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee of CUPE 3902