

City of Toronto: Cancel Conference Trip to Jerusalem

Dear Mayor Tory and Toronto City Councillors,

As concerned Torontonians for a lasting peace in the Middle East, we believe the Mayor's office should decline attending a mid-May conference in Israel entitled, "Jerusalem as a culturally Competent City,"

For obvious human rights reasons, clearly outlined in the City's Human Rights Policy 3.0 ("not engaging in behaviour that would constitute discrimination [of Palestinians while] educating employees to ensure they know what constitutes...discrimination"), we urge city officials at the Office of Equity, Diversity and Human Rights to refuse to participate in the keynote speaker address - in a conference where speakers from Israeli settlements encourage illegal settlement activity and undermines Canada's responsibility to respect international humanitarian laws.

We believe Toronto's *Human Rights Policy* must uphold Canadian human rights standards set forth by international agreements. Specifically, UN Articles [446](#), [452](#), [465](#), [471](#) and [476](#), and 242, in which Canada as a member-state, has strongly condemned Israeli human rights violations toward Palestinians. In fact, Canada voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolutions 446 and 465, which determined that the continuing Israeli settlements were a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This should give serious pause in the Mayor's office as to how conference initiatives (that discriminate against the political rights and livelihoods of Palestinians) might actually aid in expanding the Israeli economy in the Occupied Territories. Yet strangely, the Mayor's office has not yet replied to any formal request to not participate in the conference.

In a recent letter to the City of Toronto, the General Union of Palestinian Women outlined why attending the Jerusalem conference was problematic "***Your participation in this conference plays in the hands of Israel's propaganda. Falsely presenting Jerusalem as a 'culturally competent city' masks the city's reality: arbitrary killings of indigenous Palestinians and systematic discrimination with the explicit aim of ridding the city of its Palestinian residents. Equity cannot exist in Jerusalem until Israel's systematic discriminatory laws are changed. We urge you to refrain from aiding our oppression: cancel your participation in this conference.***"

Yet under the City's Human Rights policy guidelines, "appropriate complaint exploration/resolution processes must be raised documenting details of concerns, actions taken, outcomes or remedies implemented." More forthrightly, City employees must, "ensure discrimination has stopped and does not reoccur" and that the Human Rights Office must address any alleged breach of this policy, particularly when a complaint has been raised or referred to under division management, the Mayor's office and/or Toronto City Council.

So far, no one has addressed the conferences insidious motives and the City of Toronto has declined any formal meeting with Palestinian representatives about their human rights concerns. In your rush to establish greater ties with Israel, the City of Toronto is challenging legal protocols while risking scuttling attempts at an international peace agreement to end the occupation and Israeli state repression. Forms of repression towards Palestinians are aimed at silencing dissent regarding Israel violations of international law from within and beyond. This can be clearly illustrated with Israel's continued repression of media groups covering human rights abuses in the Occupied Territory. In May 2016, 19 Palestinian journalists were arrested by Israeli forces including the [detaining](#) of William Booth, *The Washington*

Post's bureau chief in Jerusalem while interviewing Palestinian youth at the Damascus Gate in February, Even more troubling was the killing of Iyad Omar Sajadiyya, a 22-year-old [journalism student](#), shot in the head during fierce confrontations that broke out when Israeli forces raided the West Bank refugee camp.

As Mayor of Toronto, with a mandate to protect human rights and stem the tide of discrimination against minority groups, we urge the Mayor's office and City Councillors to assess the merits of our concerns about cancelling your visit to Israel and determine how an appropriate complaint investigation and resolution procedure may allow Toronto politicians to discuss openly: why Palestinian lives matter and what City Council can do to bring peace to the Middle East. Declining an invitation to speak at a conference in Jerusalem may send the a most powerful message to human rights abusers: that the, "City of Toronto will not tolerate, ignore, or condone discrimination...and is committed to promoting respectful conduct, tolerance and diversity at all times."

Click City of Toronto Human Rights

Policy: <https://wx.toronto.ca/intra/hr/policies.nsf/a8170e9c63677876852577d7004f8/c8c007fd9cd24c6585257d4e00653676?OpenDocument>

Thank you for addressing our concerns and we await your response.

Sincerely,

Davis & Rhonda Casta-Mirza

Toronto, CANADA

Dated: 10/05/2016
