

November 24, 2017
Via email "mayor_tory@toronto.ca"

Mayor John Tory,
Chair of the City of Toronto Executive Committee,
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West, 2nd Floor
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Mayor Tory;

I write to you on behalf of the Al-Quds Committee, of which I am the Chairperson. I write in relation to Administrative Inquiry IA34.1 from Councilor James Pasternak, Ward 10, York Centre (the "Pasternak Inquiry") and the Answer from the Deputy City Manager, Cluster A, to the Executive Committee.

We understand that the Pasternak Inquiry and EX29.42 is scheduled to be considered by the Executive Committee at its meeting of November 28, 2017.

By way of background, the Al-Quds Committee is group of concerned Canadians / Torontonians for justice for Palestinians and their human rights as noted by international laws and many UN and Security Council Resolutions to end the occupation of Palestine. The Al Quds Committee organizes its supporting communities to participate in almost every solidarity action / event in support of Palestine that is held in the Toronto area.

In particular, the Al Quds Committee echoes international actions around the globe by organizing Al Quds Day in Toronto. The purpose of Al-Quds Day is to affirm worldwide opposition to Israel's 50-year occupation of Al- Quds / Jerusalem and Palestinian land. ("Al Quds" is the Arabic term for Jerusalem.) These actions typically occur in the last week of Ramadan (Muslim month of fasting).

According to Councilor Pasternak, the Al Quds rally is "hate-infested" and "anti-Semitic". Moreover, Councilor Pasternak places the Al Quds rally in the same category as white supremacist and neo-Nazi rallies. More particularly, Councilor Pasternak alleges that "for the past several years there has been an Al Quds Day rally held in Toronto outside Queen's Park featuring speakers making anti-Semitic and anti-Christian remarks, spreading hatred, inciting violence and supporting of terrorist organizations such as Hamas. Al Quds Day was originally created to call for the destruction of the state of Israel."

These are extraordinarily serious allegations for which Councilor Pasternak fails to cite an iota of evidence. We reject and object to these allegations in the strongest possible terms. In fact, the Al-Quds committee unequivocally condemns anti-Semitism, white supremacy and Nazism in all of their insidious forms. The mandate of our committee is profoundly anti-racist and is diametrically opposed to the goals of white supremacists, Nazis and other anti-Semites.

It is quite true that we are highly critical of the inhumane policies of the state of Israel, but so too is virtually the entire international community. The Canadian government itself recognizes on its Global Affairs website that Israel's settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territory violate the Fourth Geneva Convention and are a "serious obstacle" to peace. The Canadian government also refuses to recognize Israel's illegal annexation of East Jerusalem. In December 2016, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2334 by a vote of 14-0, with the U.S. abstaining. Resolution 2334 describes Israel's settlements as a "flagrant violation" of international law. In

2004, the International Court of Justice ruled unanimously, and with the concurrence of the United States judge, that Israel's settlements violate the Fourth Geneva Convention. Even worse, Amnesty International and the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, among other human rights groups, have documented Israeli forces' torture of Palestinian adults and even Palestinian children, and Israel's use of collective punishment and extra-judicial assassination in violation of international law.

There is nothing remotely anti-Semitic about condemning these appalling human rights abuses and calling for sanctions to be imposed upon the state of Israel to bring these abuses to an end. On the contrary, based upon our extensive interactions with our brothers and sisters in the Jewish community, we believe that Israel's conduct is an affront to Jewish values and in no way represents the Jewish people, despite the Netanyahu government's claims to the contrary. Whether or not Toronto's city council is prepared to recognize the dire plight of the Palestinian people, all Canadians, including those who participate in Al-Quds rallies, enjoy fundamental democratic rights under Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. These include the rights enumerated under section 2 of the Charter, namely, the freedom of conscience and religion, the freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, the freedom of peaceful assembly and the freedom of association. We assure Toronto City Council that we will not sit idly by while Councilors like James Pasternak seek to curtail our fundamental freedoms, and that we will pursue all available legal recourses to protect our constitutional rights.

We also note that Councilor Pasternak's anti-democratic attack on supporters of Al-Quds was pursued without any notice to our committee and without the Executive Committee inviting us to address these most serious and utterly baseless allegations. We therefore request that the Executive Committee grant us a reasonable opportunity to be heard at the meeting of November 28. This is the bare minimum that due process requires.

Finally, we note that, only weeks ago, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) agreed to revise an online resource guide developed for Islamic Heritage Month hours after pro-Israel lobby group B'nai Brith Canada raised concerns that the TDSB's definition of Islamophobia would muzzle staff and students. It is quite remarkable that the institutions of the City of Toronto are prepared to narrow the definition of Islamophobia in order to give organizations like B'Nai Brith maximum latitude to demonize Islam, but that Councilors like James Pasternak spread falsehoods about our organization in order to silence us. Should Mr. Pasternak succeed in his transparent attempt to stifle our right of free speech, the message to Toronto's many Muslim residents will be clear: The City of Toronto values the right to free speech -- except when the speaker is a Palestinian, Arab or Muslim.

We look forward to hearing from your office so that we can fully address this most grave attack against our organization and rights as full citizens to participate in civil society and the civic process.

Yours very truly,



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