

Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies

July 31, 2009

To: MPs Scott Reid & Mario Silva, Chairs of CPCCA

RE: Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism; FSWC Submission

From: Avi Benlolo, President and CEO, FSWC

Dear Mr. Reid and Mr. Silva,

I wish to commend you both on your continued work with the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism. Please accept our attached submission to the panel, which was prepared specifically for this inquiry.

The Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre (FSWC) along with our membership of 25,000 Canadians greatly appreciates this opportunity to contribute to your ongoing inquiry into antisemitism. We would welcome additional opportunities to assist the Committee in achieving its goals.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

Avi Benlolo

President & CEO, Canada

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This submission was prepared specifically for this inquiry.

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**Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies** is a Canadian human rights organization dedicated to fostering tolerance and understanding through community involvement, educational outreach and social action. It has 25,000 members across Canada, and confronts important contemporary issues including racism, anti-Semitism, terrorism and genocide. The Center is affiliated with the world-wide, Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, an accredited Non-Government Organization with status at international agencies, including the United Nations, UNESCO, OSCE and the Council of Europe. With over 400,000 members of all faiths around the world, the Simon Wiesenthal Center has offices in New York, Miami, Paris, Jerusalem, Buenos Aires and Toronto. Simon Wiesenthal died in 2005 after devoting his life to preserving the memories of the victims of the Holocaust, while simultaneously seeking justice for the war criminals.

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Les Amis du Centre Simon Wiesenthal pour les Études sur l'Holocauste est un organisme canadien voué à la promotion de la tolérance et de la compréhension par l'entremise de la participation, de la sensibilisation et de l'action sociale. Comptant plus de 25 000 membres de toutes les religions, cet organisme s'attaque à plusieurs problèmes actuels, notamment le racisme, l'antisémitisme, le terrorisme et le génocide. Il est affilié à un organisme international situé à Los Angeles, le Simon Wiesenthal Center. Ce dernier est une ONG accréditée et reconnue par les organismes internationaux, dont les Nations Unies, l'UNESCO, l'OSCE et le Conseil de l'Europe, et possède des bureaux à New York, Miami, Paris, Jérusalem, Buenos Aires et Toronto. Simon Wiesenthal est mort en septembre 2005 à l'âge de 96 ans après avoir voué sa vie à la justice.

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## **1. Introduction**

When it comes to human rights, Canada is the most progressive, tolerant, and respectful country on earth. Unfortunately, anti-Semitism has emerged as a major problem in Canada over the last decade. It has manifested itself in many ways ranging from the traditional (vandalism and graffiti) to the extreme (fire bombings of schools, community centres and synagogues) and now to the subversive - an anti-Semitism which permeates institutions and threatens to change the very fabric of this nation.

A 2009 Angus Reid poll says that 47% of Canadians do not hold favourable views of Judaism, and 14% believe Judaism teaches violence.<sup>1</sup> These statistics may signal that many Canadians could harbor or adopt anti-Semitic attitudes, unless proactive measures are undertaken.

What concerns the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center today is the creeping institutionalization of anti-Semitism in Canada by prominent unions, universities, churches and businesses, and some human rights organizations. Much of today's anti-Semitism manifests in anti-Israel agitation around boycotts, divestment and sanctions. It deploys an unfair double standard against the Jewish state, singling out of Israel alone for one-sided, harsh criticism and calls for punitive actions. Some of the criticism approaches open incitement that contributes to hatred of Israel, Judaism, and the Jewish people in the mainstream of society.

## **2. Universities**

Anti-Semitism, fueled by the demonization of Israel, has been a growing problem on Canadian campuses in many ways such as the violent protestors who blocked Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu from speaking at Concordia University in September 2002.<sup>2</sup> Since then, a climate of hate and intolerance has spread to university campuses across Canada. The normalization of virulently anti-Israel invective at demonstrations, attacks against "Zionists", biased lectures and conferences have spawned an atmosphere in which Jewish students, faculty, and staff feel targeted and vulnerable.

### **2a. University of Toronto**

The University of Toronto is the birthplace of "Israeli Apartheid Week," an event which, since its inception in 2005, has spread to over 40 university campuses across the globe. The week-long series of lectures and demonstrations conveys and inculcates the idea that Israel is responsible for "ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> Maclean's Magazine. 4 May 2009. What Canadians think of Sikhs, Jews, Christians, Muslims...

<sup>2</sup> The Globe and Mail. 14 September 2002. Concordia: A campus in conflict; Tensions between Arab, Jewish students; poison atmosphere at Montreal university.

cleansing” and the “colonization of all Arab lands.”<sup>3</sup> Avi Benlolo, president and CEO of Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre (FSWC) states, “Students have come to us and have reported that they feel intimidated, threatened, and uncomfortable attending university at this time of wrongful behavior and unrest.” By enabling Israeli Apartheid Week to occur, the University of Toronto (and now other Canadian universities) is complicit in perpetuating and spreading accusations and propaganda designed to vilify Israel and the entire Jewish community.

## 2b. York University

In June 2009, York University hosted a highly controversial conference titled, “Israel/Palestine: Mapping Models of Statehood and Paths to Peace,” which received national media attention.<sup>4</sup> While the event was promoted as a dialogue on peaceful solutions in the Middle East, the conference speakers presented the One-state solution as the only viable option.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, many of the speakers are heavily involved in anti-Israel campaigns.<sup>6</sup> Instead of offering a fair and balanced debate, the conference used the veil of academic freedom to legitimize calls for the elimination of Israel as a Jewish state.

York University has also been the setting for a series of threats against Jewish students, and direct attacks on individuals and groups. On February 4<sup>th</sup> 2009, a York student who is actively involved in pro-Israeli campus organizations received a phone call that violently threatened him and his family. Police investigated for hate crimes.<sup>7</sup> During that same week, another Jewish student reported that she was assaulted by an Anti-Israeli protestor.<sup>8</sup> At a press conference on February 11<sup>th</sup> 2009, Jewish students were berated with anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli slogans. Fearing for their safety, these students took refuge in the office of a student group on campus. Anti-Israel demonstrators surrounded the room, and police had to be called in to escort the Jewish students to safety.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the guise of academic freedom is used as protection for and cover-up of the hateful mislabeling of Israel as a “Nazi” and “apartheid” state. In such an environment, Jewish students are reporting incidents of threats and intimidation. Unless proactive counter measures are taken, anti-Semitism on Canadian campuses will continue to fester.

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<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Jewish News. 6 February 2008. Israel Apartheid Week Gains Momentum.  
<[http://www.cjnews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14001&Itemid=101](http://www.cjnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14001&Itemid=101)>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.yorku.ca/ipconf/>

<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Jewish News. 7 May 2009. JDL Objects to ‘Israel/Palestine’ conference at York.  
<[http://www.cjnews.com/index2.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=16843&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=101](http://www.cjnews.com/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16843&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=101)>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> The Canadian Jewish News. 19 February 2009. Jewish students under ‘siege’ at York U.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Businesses

The use of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric by and against Canadian businesses has become a far too frequent occurrence. Three recent examples serve to illustrate how anti-Semitism has permeated the Canadian business community.

#### 3a. Mountain Equipment Co-op

In April 2009, group of Mountain Equipment Co-op members proposed a resolution at its annual meeting that sought a boycott of Israeli products and the termination of transactions with its three Israeli suppliers. This collection of members, which was mostly comprised of schoolteachers, mislabelled Israel as an apartheid state.<sup>10</sup>

While Israel is a free democracy, MEC does have a wide range of suppliers from countries with questionable human rights records. However, there was no similar call for a boycott of MEC's 23 suppliers from China, a country with a repressive government that has been responsible for a plethora of human rights abuses. MEC justified its business relationships with Chinese companies by claiming that such interactions can encourage human rights. However, a resolution to boycott Israel would have directly contradicted this assertion. Although the members ultimately voted down the resolution at the annual general meeting, the fact that the issue came under discussion signifies anti-Semitism in action.

#### 3b. Le Select Bistro

In June 2009, an exhibit of the Dead Sea Scrolls was set to open at the Royal Ontario Museum. In anticipation of the opening, the owner of Le Select Bistro, a restaurant in downtown Toronto, posted comments on the restaurant's website urging its customers to boycott the ROM's exhibit. The restaurateur claimed that the exhibit features "artefacts seized by Israel in its 1967 surprise war which ... led to the seizure and the ongoing military occupation of many lands." The message went on to read

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<sup>10</sup> The Vancouver Sun, 21 April 2009. Camping Retailer Mountain Equipment Co-op considers Israel boycott.<<http://www.vancouversun.com/Business/Camping+retailer+Mountain+Equipment+considers+Israel+boycott/1520051/story.html>>

that “[b]y showcasing these artefacts, the ROM is violating Canada’s responsibilities under the UNESCO Conventions and Protocols.”<sup>11</sup>

The restaurateur’s vilification of the State of Israel is unfair in its use of one-sided facts and distortion of history to condemn one country. The call for a boycott of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were written in Hebrew by Jewish ancestors and purchased legally by the modern State of Israel, illustrates a direct attempt to undermine and expunge Jewish culture. These critics are intentionally misrepresenting facts by claiming that the ancient manuscripts are stolen artefacts that were obtained by an aggressive war and occupation. These claims are untrue, and belie the tradition and vivacity of Jewish culture.

### 3c. Targeting Indigo Books & Music Inc.

In 2007, Indigo Books & Music Inc. was the subject of boycotts and protests. The demonstrators maligned Indigo CEO Heather Reisman’s involvement with the Heseg Foundation, a charitable organization that provides University scholarships for former Israeli soldiers.<sup>12</sup> In one instance, an anti-Semitic caricature of Ms. Reisman was distributed by the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid. The same coalition disrupted Indigo lectures on several occasions.

The recurring use of anti-Israel rhetoric by and against Canadian businesses represents the normalization of hate in the Canadian corporate domain. Sanctions, boycotts, and divestments that exclusively target Israel and ignore well-documented human-rights abusers, are signs of anti-Semitic behaviour and prejudicial attitudes that compromise the integrity of the Canadian business sector.

## 4. Unions

Some prominent Canadian Trade Unions have been transformed into instruments for advancing anti-Israel and anti-Semitic agendas unrelated to the unions’ primary agendas. Such actions may be the result of naiveté or underlying prejudices held by individuals. The recurring charges against Israel by unions are exemplified here.

### 4a. CUPE Ontario

CUPE Ontario has been fomenting anti-Israel agitation for many years – having passed boycott, sanctions and divestment resolutions and produced “educational material” like “The Wall Must Fall” –

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<sup>11</sup> The National Post, 30 June 2009. Downtown bistro hit with controversy over Dead Sea scroll boycott <<http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/toronto/archive/2009/06/30/downtown-bistro-faces-anti-semitism-accusations.aspx>>

<sup>12</sup> The National Post, 11 June 2007. Boycotting reason, Celebrating hate.

referring to Israel's security barrier.<sup>13</sup> Most recently, in February 2009, the Ontario division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) responded to the Gaza War by passing a motion that strengthened calls for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions against Israel, including a full academic boycott. This resolution is consistent with CUPE Ontario's systematic blaming of only one side in a complex conflict.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4b. CUPW

In April 2008, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) supported a resolution calling for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel. The CUPW resolution mislabelled Israel as an "apartheid state" and "demand[ed] that the Israeli-West Bank barrier be immediately torn down."<sup>15</sup> These resolutions exclusively blame one side in the conflict, and demean Israel as an Apartheid state.

#### 4c. Positive Example set by the Carpenters' Union

In September of 2008, the Canada Council of Carpenters adopted a resolution that supports the pursuit of peace and democracy in the Middle East. The Carpenters' Union explicitly expressed its support for "Israel as a democratic nation state built on foundations of equality, equity, justice and freedom" and rebuked other trade unions for "attempting to undermine the legitimacy of Israel's democracy."<sup>16</sup> The measures taken by the Carpenters' Union prove that Canadian trade unions do have the potential to be vehicles for balanced and fair voices for international understanding.

### 5. Rights Groups

In recent years, the agendas of some Rights groups have embraced boycott, divestment and sanction campaigns against Israel. Here is one example of how one rights group became an apparatus for the spread of anti-Semitic rhetoric.

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<sup>13</sup>CUPE. 15 June 2005. "The Wall Must Fall" <[http://cupe.ca/global-justice/The\\_Wall\\_Must\\_Fall](http://cupe.ca/global-justice/The_Wall_Must_Fall)>  
<<http://cupe.ca/updir/WallMustFall2007-eng.pdf>>

<sup>14</sup>CUPE Ontario. 22 February 2009. CUPE Ontario's Response to Gaza Crisis.  
<[http://www.cupe.on.ca/doc.php?subject\\_id=152&lang=en](http://www.cupe.on.ca/doc.php?subject_id=152&lang=en)>

<sup>15</sup>CUPW. 24 April 2008. CUPW delegates take firm stand to support Palestinian workers.  
<[http://www.cupw.ca/index.cfm?ci\\_id=10664&la\\_id=1](http://www.cupw.ca/index.cfm?ci_id=10664&la_id=1)>

<sup>16</sup>Resolution to the Canada Council 2008 Convention- Victoria BC. Re: "Support for Israel and Peace in the Middle East."

## 5a. Toronto Pride Week

Over the past few years, Toronto's Pride Week has become a venue for anti-Israel demonstrations. The organization "Queers Against Israeli Apartheid" (QuAIA) has been allowed to march in the parade with banners reading "End Israeli Apartheid" and signs equating Zionism with Nazism.<sup>17</sup> Although Pride Toronto states on its website that it adopts and upholds the City of Toronto's policy statement prohibiting discrimination and harassment and protects the right to be free of hate activity, the inclusion of QuAIA in the parade directly contravenes this policy.<sup>18</sup>

Toronto lawyer and gay rights advocate Martin Gladstone emphasizes that anti-Israel advocacy has no relevance to the event, stating, "It's supposed to be a celebration of diversity, inclusion and tolerance. But it's a microcosm of the anti-Semitism that's happening globally."<sup>19</sup>

In April 2008, Jewish community leaders met with the Pride committee to address our concerns. However, the committee ignored the complaints. This hateful display recurred in June 2009.

## 6. Community Violence and Radicalism

History shows that anti-Semitic rhetoric and attitudes can lead to radicalism and violence. In Canadian communities, anti-Semitism has been inflamed by lectures from extremist speakers, erupting in numerous violent displays.

### 6a. Radical Speakers

On April 5, 2009, the Palestine House organization hosted Ekrima Sabri, Imam of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem; and Atallah Hannah, the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Sebastia, as featured guest speakers in Mississauga, Ontario.<sup>20</sup> Both have well-documented histories of making anti-Semitic remarks that incite hate and violence against Jews and others.

In February 2005, Sabri, quoting from a debunked anti-Semitic screed, said that "anyone who studies *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and specifically the Talmud will discover that one of the goals of these Protocols is to cause confusion in the world and to undermine security throughout the world."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The National Post. 29 May 2009. Political Banners OK with Pride Toronto.

<<http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/toronto/archive/2009/05/30/285033.aspx>>

<sup>18</sup> Pride Toronto.

<sup>19</sup> Jewish Tribune. 26 May 2009. Pride parade 'microcosm of anti-Semitism happening globally.

<<http://www.jewishtribune.ca/TribuneV2/index.php/200905261677/Pride-parade-mircocosm-of-anti-Semitism-happening-globally.html>>

<sup>20</sup> The Canadian Jewish News. 02 April 2009. Group calls for investigation into Palestinian clerics.

<sup>21</sup> Times Online. 02 March 2005. The anti-Jewish lie that refuses to die.

In July 2008, Hannah explained that he “do[es] not believe in so-called ‘peace with Israel’ because peace cannot be made with Satan.”<sup>22</sup>

Despite the openly hateful and dangerous messages of these men they, and others like them, are regularly invited to speak in Canada.

#### 6b. Street Violence

During the 2009 Gaza War, Canadian citizens exercised their democratic right by taking to the streets to rally and demonstrate in support of both sides of the conflict. However, at protests in Toronto and Montreal, many anti-Israel protestors shouted slogans advocating the killing of Jews and the obliteration of Israel. They held signs equating Israel with Nazi Germany and burned Israeli flags.<sup>23</sup>

Such hatemongering has no place in Canadian society and poses a threat to the safety of Canadian citizens. The dissemination of vitriol and misinformation only serves to encourage hateful ideologies and violence.

### 7. Internet Hate

- Anti-Semitism frequently appears online. In August 2008, the hateful and anti-Semitic content of [www.realjewishnews.com](http://www.realjewishnews.com) appeared on the site’s Canadian ISP provider. Although the website was shut down, it reappeared on a foreign ISP provider and continues to promote hate through blatant misinformation.<sup>24</sup>
- A University of Toronto student was investigated by the RCMP and OPP for comments he posted on various sites and chat rooms. Salman Hossain called for the murder of Jews and Canadian soldiers, including one instance in which he explicitly expressed a desire to “shoot a few Jews down.”<sup>25</sup> As of July 15, 2009, Hossain had yet to be prosecuted for hate crimes.<sup>26</sup>
- In March 2009, in the wake of the Gaza War, a middle school in Richmond Hill, Ontario, reported online hate messaging wherein a Jewish student was ridiculed and targeted for her political and religious affiliations.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> FrontPage Magazine. 9 February 2005. ‘Peace’ through Anti-Semitism.

<sup>23</sup> The National Post. 14 January 2009. Rallies incited hatred, says Jewish group; Police urged to investigate anti-Israel demonstrations.

<sup>24</sup> FSWC. 20 August 2008. Canadian Internet Service Provider shuts down Internet Hate site.

<sup>25</sup> The National Post. 30 January 2008. Killing Canadians ‘best way’: student.

<sup>26</sup> The Toronto Star. 30 June 2009. AG reviewing CJC’s request to examine hateful web postings.

<sup>27</sup> Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre.

To contain and marginalize anti-Semitism in Canada and elsewhere, individuals who spread hate in this fashion must be brought to justice. To that end, in 2009, FSWC released Digital Terrorism and Hate 2.0, an annual interactive CD-ROM report on online extremist operations.<sup>28</sup>

## **8. Conclusion**

As anti-Semitism proliferates across various sectors of society, including universities, businesses, unions, rights groups, Churches, NGOs, community and speaker venues, and online, it threatens the very core of Canadian Life. Not only does anti-Semitism vilify Israel, it incites hatred, and encourages Canadians to be less accepting and tolerant of others.

The mainstreaming and institutionalization of anti-Semitism threatens the security and well-being of Canadian Jews and the preservation of Canadian values. There is a need for increased awareness that this hatred is gaining ground, and for the adoption of direct and strong action to ensure that such prejudices and injustices are openly opposed on moral and, when appropriate, legal grounds. Anti-Semitic rhetoric and behaviour can never be allowed to compromise our community's safety or our individual constitutional rights.

In addition to countering the hate directly, The Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre welcomes every opportunity to assist with any initiative that would encourage positive dialogue, create meaningful experiences, develop tolerance, and engage in respectful outreach that contributes to responsible and constructive approaches toward living and working together.

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<sup>28</sup> Available by contacting Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre