

**WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY PANEL TO HOLD INQUIRY INTO
ANTISEMITISM IN CANADA**

Submitted by

Noemi Gal-Or, Ph.D., LL.B. ♦

The Honourable Mario Silva, M.P., Chair
The Honourable Scott Reid, M.P., Vice Chair
Honourable Members of the Inquiry Panel

This submission is prepared especially for the inquiry. Annexed to the submission is a relevant paper published in 2005, co-authored by me and a colleague.

I thank the Inquiry Panel for the opportunity to share my experience with it members.

This submission consists of two parts: One part describes my direct personal experience with anti-Semitism in Canada as a university professor; the second part addresses my personal experience as a member of a group set up to challenge anti-Semitism on BC's post-secondary education campuses. Anti-Semitism exists also in other Canadian contexts the description of which is excluded from this submission.

I. Direct personal experience with anti-Semitism in Canada

1. My personal experience with anti-Semitism in Canada is largely confined to my experience as a professor on university campuses in BC. It ranges back to the early 1990s (at institutions other than my current employer), when it was subtly transpiring from underneath a veneer of anti-Israel criticism. It was expressed against me personally by (a) targeting my area of academic expertise as illegitimate and relating this also to my Israeli origin and the fact that I served in the Israeli Defense Forces, and (b) spreading rumours about me in connection with my area of expertise. I am an expert in the study of terrorism (as far as I know, I was the first in the post-Second World War era to graduate with a Ph.D. thesis on this subject, completed in 1982, almost twenty years prior to 9/11).

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2. In recent years, I have increasingly been challenged by students during class, especially regarding the Holocaust and including comments likening the Israeli government's treatment of the Palestinians to genocide. In some student essays, Hitler was praised for his contributions to Germany. I also received an anonymous hate phone call at home, which may not be related to my employment. Nevertheless, this experience at Kwantlen Polytechnic University has been negligible when compared with other campuses in BC and across Canada.

3. All of this changed when on February 2009, I experienced for the first time direct (not the common subtle variation), explicit, and threatening anti-Semitism on campus. A Canadian-Palestinian student in my 4th year seminar on Public International Law tried to provoke me right from the outset of the term (January 2009 when Operation Cast Lead – the war in Gaza - took place). He was coming to class wearing a "Castro" army cap and a Kefiya (Arab male head scarf) wrapped around his face covering his chin, mouth, and part of his nose. When this failed (I ignored it), the tactic changed. The student began to pile up books on his desk (we were seated in a quadrangle) and was preoccupied reading them during our seminar discussion. For pedagogical reasons, I was unable to let this pass. When I mentioned to the student that he was expected to concentrate on the discussion in class, he replied that he was reading the books, which he said were on Palestine and Israel, for his other seminar on human rights. I later learned from the student himself, and from another professor, that in all the student's Political Science classes, the student was making provocative anti-Semitic and anti-Israel comments, but stood corrected by my colleagues. He also asked another professor to advertise similar political events to his students.

The provocation thus escalated until when on February 16, 2009, I arrived in class, took my seat, and saw the following writing on the blackboard facing me:

"You exist, therefore I am offended.

Do not let the olive branch fall off my hand.

Revolution is imperative in Palestine. We are at a crossroads in effecting progressive change. You have nothing to lose but your chains." [Emphasis added]

A map of Israel was drawn below the writing, divided into bizarre sections, and next to it - the Palestinian flag.

The first two sentences were written by the Palestinian student, the other by another student of Middle Eastern background. I don't know who of the two drew the map. The next class, "hasta la revolution siempre" welcomed me from on one of the blackboards, written by the Canadian-Palestinian student, and another Marxist slogan was written by the other student, on another blackboard in the same classroom. Both students were good learners and very amicable persons.

I should note in parenthesis, that the incident closely followed two other incidents. Two weeks prior to the incident, I received a hate email sent by "Youth of Islam" with email address "I.am.Hitler.2009". I notified the VPD and my institution's security. It most likely came from Saudi Arabia. The other incident it followed was an anti-Israel event on campus. In November 2008, I was approached by a colleague professor requesting my assistance in organizing a conference on home demolitions in the Occupied Territories in the West Bank for our students. I declined the offer because our students lacked the requisite informative background. We do not offer any courses on the Middle East or any other relevant education needed to prepare student do discuss such a highly charged political issue in an informed and unbiased manner. Political events on campus must be elective and clearly differentiated from academic events in which students' participation may be mandatory. The conference, which took place January 2009, was eventually transformed into an event entitled "Ghettoizing Palestinians, Massacring Gaza".

I took the February 16th incident very seriously. First, I asked another colleague for his opinion regarding the writing on the backboard (he saw it after class was over). He considered the writing a threat directed at me and advised me to inform administration. I contacted my Dean and senior administration. The process – the first of its kind at my university – resulted in placing a notation on the Palestinian student's file. I have the correspondence and documentation available, including a report by the student, which appeared to me to have been written by a lawyer. In the process, the student told me

and the Dean that he was vice-President of the Canadian Arab Federation; he was born in Canada but educated grades 1-9 in Tripoli, Lebanon, where he lived in a refugee camp; and that he was "working" with Arab political parties (that's how he put it, he didn't say Palestinian) in Israel.

4. I consider this incident as representing part of a context wider than my university or even the Canadian environment. I have now been experiencing this "atmosphere" when attending conferences in Europe and elsewhere. However, developments abroad have increasingly been spilling over into Canada, and becoming more pronounced on our country's post-secondary education campuses. While for long exhibited in form of sub-text in many academic circumstances, it has recently turned explicit, also at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

As a side note, my child experienced anti-Semitism in elementary school (in the early 1990s) from two classmates.

II. Personal experience as member of a group set up to challenges anti-Semitism on BC's post secondary education campuses

In 2003, I joined the group forming the BC Campus Action Coalition (<http://BC-CAC.org>), established to counter anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism (the attack on Jews' right to national self-determination and Israel's right to exist). As a member of the group's Executive and past Chair, I have learned much about anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism on Canadian and other campuses as well as in other milieus. The Committee may find the paper (co-authored with Howard Stein) "The Debate on Canadian Campuses. Bringing Back Democracy and the Spirit of Scholarship", *Inroads* 16, Winter/Spring 2005, pp. 44-51 (www.inroadsjournal.ca) of interest (attached).