

**An Open Letter to the University of Manitoba Students' Union from the
Canadian Students' Coalition for Palestine**

Organizations are invited to sign on to this statement. To sign on, email canadianSCP@gmail.com, or visit <http://www.palestinianconference.org/sign-on-open-letter-to-umsu/>

April 14, 2013

To:

The University of Manitoba Students' Union Council
Local 103 of the Canadian Federation of Students
101 University Centre, Winnipeg, MB

We are writing to express our grave concern about the UMSU's decision to revoke the student club status of the University of Manitoba's branch of Students Against Israeli Apartheid (SAIA), and further to ban SAIA from operating in "UMSU spaces." By denying students at UManitoba the right to initiate and operate SAIA, you are denying them the right to engage in criticism of the State of Israel, and this decision is a flagrant violation of students' Fundamental Freedoms of Expression and of Association as enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms under sections 2(b) and 2(d).

We understand and indeed share your commitments and aspirations to protect the Human Rights of all students and to eradicate discrimination and harassment based on the Protected Grounds as defined in both Provincial and Federal Human Rights Legislation. However, we believe that your interpretation of such legislation sets a dangerous standard by conflating nationalist ideologies with individual national origins, and by equating criticism of state policies with harassment of persons on the basis of national origin. We urge you to reconsider these false equivalencies between concepts and principles, and to pay closer attention to the complexities and political motivations of the arguments being drawn.

Firstly, we would like to respectfully point out that Zionism is not and should not be confused with an individual's national origin. Zionism is a nationalist ideology that pursues the establishment and endurance of a Jewish state or homeland on the traditional lands of the Palestinians. Like all ideologies, Zionism is often highly valued and held close to its adherents as an inextricable part of their individual identity. This does not mean, however, that it is equal to a person's or individual's national origin or Israeliness. Indeed, there are many Israeli citizens who are not Zionist, for example many of the 1,617,000 Palestinian citizens of Israel who are subject to multiple forms of discrimination despite citizenship because of the fact they are not Jewish. Palestinian citizens of Israel are excluded from the Zionist project. Also, there are many leftist anti-Zionist Jewish citizens of Israel who believe in a democratic Israeli state with equal rights for all of its citizens regardless of ethnicity or religion. Furthermore, there are many Jewish-identified Canadians in Manitoba and across Canada who stand

proudly in solidarity with Palestinians and who define their religious and/or ethnic identity as separate from and/or in opposition to the ideology of Zionism.

Secondly, criticism directed at any state, especially criticism that is firmly based in the principles and standards of International Law and Human Rights conventions, should never be conflated with harassment directed at individuals or groups of a particular national origin. We are especially concerned that this type of conflation will lead to a dangerous precedent where Academic Freedom is stifled and where student clubs engaging in Human Rights activism will be targeted by increased administrative sanctions. The international solidarity movement with Palestinians, of which Students Against Israeli Apartheid is a part, is a peaceful movement modeled on the successful human rights campaign against South Africa during the days of South African Apartheid. According to the logic of UMSU's Motion, criticism of South African Apartheid would have been a form of discrimination against White Afrikaner Nationalists in South Africans. This is not such a far off or unlikely scenario; during the days of Apartheid in South Africa, White Afrikaner's and their allies around the world made this exact argument. By this same logic Tamil student groups could be banned for criticizing the Human Rights violations of the Sri Lankan state, Tibetan student groups could be banned for criticizing the Human Rights violations of the Chinese state, and where even indigenous and Métis student groups could be banned for criticizing the Human Rights violations and reservation system of the Canadian state. We also emphasize the importance of a broad view of human rights, including the importance of acknowledging our roles as settlers on the stolen indigenous land of Turtle Island, and a statement of solidarity with Indigenous peoples, as well as an acknowledgement of Canadian settler colonialism is often read aloud at the beginning of our events.

Thirdly, we would also like to draw attention to the section of the Motion that criticizes Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) and the activities of SAIA in the promotion of this week on university campuses. We are extremely concerned that your Motion, without any evidence, claims that incidents of "violence and harassment" have occurred in universities across Canada. As organizers of various IAW events across the country we have not heard anything of these supposed incidents of "violence and harassment." Both SAIA and IAW maintain and enforce a very strict anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policy. All forms of hate-speech, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are banned from our official events and organizations. To ensure this, our moderators, speakers and marshals are all trained and updated throughout the week on how to maintain and enforce these policies. As a standard practice, a statement of anti-discrimination is read aloud prior to every IAW event. Thus, IAW does not, in any way, endorse "violence and harassment" of any group of students. The expression "Israeli Apartheid" may be viewed as controversial by UMSU; however, regardless of that view, it still stands that 'controversy' is neither a form of, nor equivalent to harassment by any standard of comparison. Revealing the racist dynamics of Zionism is no more an act of hatred than criticizing the justifications of settler-colonialism implicit in Canadian nationalist ideologies.

We note that this resolution was passed by members of the incoming council, making an end run around this year's UMSU executive, and will expire on May 1. We want to be clear that we will not sit silently by if any attempts are made next year to decertify, refuse to recognize, or otherwise infringe

Students Against Israeli Apartheid's right to organize, express themselves, and work for human rights on the campus of the University of Manitoba in the coming academic year.

We urge you to reconsider the Motion you have put forward and passed, as well as the logic and principles upon which it is purportedly based. We hope that you will be careful not to make conflation that can lead to the unjust silencing of students' voices. We urge you to rescind the decision and take a step forward in committing yourselves to the principles of Academic Freedom, as well as the Fundamental Freedoms of Expression and of Assembly guaranteed to all under the Canadian Charter.

Respectfully,
The Canadian Students' Coalition for Palestine,

York University's SAIA
Western University's SPHR
University of Windsor's PSG
University of Calgary's SPHR
University of Toronto Scarborough's TSJP
University of Toronto Mississauga's SAIA
McMaster University's SPHR
Wilfrid Laurier's L4P
University of Waterloo's SPHR
George Brown's SPHR
University of Guelph's SPHR
University of British Columbia's SPHR

Organizations that have signed onto this statement include:

CUPE Local 3909 (University of Manitoba) - Winnipeg, MB, Canada
Boycott from Within- Tel Aviv, Israel
Boycott Israeli Apartheid Campaign- Vancouver, BC, Canada
Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA)- Toronto, ON, Canada
Committee for Open Discussion of Zionism (CODZ)
CommonGround Collaborative – Calgary, AB, Canada
Faculty for Palestine (F4P) Carleton – Ottawa, ON, Canada
The First Peoples Council
Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) of Canada
International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN) Canada
International Workers of the World (Winnipeg GMB) - Winnipeg, MB, Canada
ISM Vancouver – Vancouver, BC, Canada
Jews for Palestinian Right of Return - USA
Labor for Palestine – USA
McMaster Muslims for Peace and Justice – Hamilton, ON, Canada
National Lawyers Guild (US) Free Palestine Subcommittee – USA
New Yorkers Against the Cornell-Technion Partnership (NYACT) – New York, USA
No One Is Illegal – Vancouver Unceded Coast Salish Territories, Canada
Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) Carleton – Ottawa, ON, Canada
Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) Ottawa – Ottawa, ON, Canada

The Palestinian Solidarity Working Group at Laurentian University – Sudbury, ON, Canada
Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QUAIA) – Vancouver, BC, Canada
Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network
Seriously Free Speech Committee – Vancouver, BC, Canada
Socialist Project (York) – Toronto, ON, Canada
Streams of Justice – Vancouver, BC, Canada
Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) National - USA
Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) Ryerson – Toronto, ON, Canada
Students Against Israeli Apartheid (SAIA) Carleton – Ottawa, ON, Canada
Students Against Israeli Apartheid (SAIA) University of Toronto- Toronto, ON, Canada
US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel – USA
Winnipeg Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (WCAIA) – Winnipeg, MB, Canada
Women In Israel