



# SUBMISSION REGARDING ANTISEMITISM AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

May 27, 2024

David Freeman, Associate Professor, Simon Fraser University  
david\_freeman@sfu.ca

My brief documents anti-Israel advocacy and policies at Simon Fraser University (SFU), the uniqueness of the demonization Israel in SFU's programming and among faculty, and draws 11 lessons for the committee. I focus on documenting the situation rather than providing guidance.

### Campus Protests

SFU Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) has organized multiple unauthorized campus protests.<sup>1</sup> I have personally witnessed chants for "intifada" and "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free", which are widely interpreted as calls for violence against and genocide of the Jews.<sup>2</sup> SJP forcibly interrupted an awards ceremony<sup>3</sup> and a Board of Governors Meeting.<sup>4</sup> SJP worked with the terrorist organization Samidoun to commandeer SFU's Belzberg Library, erase the name of its Jewish benefactor, and rename it after a member of a Palestinian terrorist organization.<sup>5</sup>

*Lesson 1: SFU allows coded calls for violence against Jews, has not prevented disruptions, and probably could not protect students against actual violence. Jewish students, staff, and faculty are probably not sufficiently safe on campus.*

### Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) and The Peak

The SFSS passed a BDS resolution in 2022 that endorses a one-sided anti-Israel narrative.<sup>6</sup> SFSS consulted<sup>7</sup> anti-Israel groups including SJP, the Palestinian Youth Movement, and Independent Jewish Voices (IJV), though none of these was an official SFSS club.<sup>8</sup> SFSS did not consult the official SFU Jewish Students Association (JSA) club or any mainstream Jewish organization. They did consult IJV, which is far outside the Jewish mainstream and has a documented history of antisemitism.<sup>9</sup> This BDS resolution was used to deny JSA room bookings.<sup>10</sup> The BDS resolution was put to a full membership vote this February and passed.<sup>11</sup> It is the only SFSS policy on a foreign issue.

The student newspaper, The Peak, ran an anti-Israel article in every issue (except the one) since October 7, 2024.<sup>12</sup> They never published any pro-Israel or balanced articles in that period.

*Lesson 2: BDS negatively affects Jewish students and impedes dialogue.*

*Lesson 3: Students are accepting and propagating one-sided anti-Israel rhetoric.*

### Organized Campus Events

To my knowledge, SFU has not centrally organized any campus events promoting dialogue on Israel/Palestine since October 7.<sup>13</sup> SFU does not have any centre or department focused on the Middle East or Jewish issues. However, SFU's Centre for Comparative Muslim Studies (CCMS) organized 41 events focused on Israel/Palestine and related issues since October 7 (out of 49 total events), compared to 3 events on all issues in January-September 2023 (one of them on Palestinian identity).<sup>14</sup> Public records suggest that all events and speakers had an anti-Israel orientation. One event featured a film that positively highlighted "armed struggle" and featured a Palestinian terrorist.<sup>15</sup> Another event featured a member of the same Palestinian terrorist organization.<sup>16</sup>

CCMS Programming included at least four events, on Israel and antisemitism, that prominently featured vocally anti-Israel Jews whose views are well outside the mainstream Jewish community. To my knowledge, zero events featured pro-Israel mainstream Jewish voices.

*Lesson 4: SFU is not promoting useful discourse across diverse perspectives. Rather, it is primarily providing a forum for anti-Israel programming.*

*Lesson 5: This anti-Israel programming actively promotes a fringe group of anti-Israel Jews to defend against accusations of antisemitism and to the exclusion of mainstream Jewish voices.*

*Lesson 6: The quantity of anti-Israel events shows that censorship of criticism of Israel is not a problem.*

#### Faculty for Palestine (F4P)

Over 200 SFU faculty and staff have signed as members of F4P<sup>17</sup> (SFU has ~1057 faculty).<sup>18</sup> I attended their March 7, 2024 event, where faculty and students explained their positions. A SJP representative repeated a blood libel claiming Israeli organ theft, was applauded by attendees, and praised by the faculty MC.<sup>19</sup> Other speeches demonized Zionist faculty. Attendees applauded a speaker who praised the “righteous resistance movement” (i.e. endorsing the terrorist attacks).

F4P openly pushed two petitions asking SFU to divest from arms manufacturing and boycott Israel and has put these motions to a vote by the SFU Faculty Association (SFUFA).<sup>20</sup> The boycott resolution is aligned with the BDS Movement. It provides a lengthy preamble on the situation in Gaza since October 2023 that completely demonizes Israel for the consequences of its war on Hamas while completely omitting any mention of the October 7 massacre or Hamas when it is clearly material to the discussion. SFUFA has never held any position on any international issue.

F4P’s “basis of unity”<sup>21</sup> includes to “support and amplify” SJP<sup>22</sup> and opposition to “heightened security measures on campus”. While the group states F4P “rejects all forms of antisemitism”, they ignore the scholarship that shows how modern antisemitism is tied to or masked as criticism of Israel.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, they platformed both a student and a faculty member<sup>24</sup> who clearly and openly expressed obviously classically antisemitic tropes. F4P states support for SJP, who supported the October 7 massacre.<sup>25</sup> Both in the F4P Townhall and in extensive faculty e-mail list discussions, F4P members have avoided condemning Hamas and the October 7 massacre. Members’ rhetoric has been identifiably distinct from Palestinian peace activists who support peace and coexistence with Israel.<sup>26</sup>

*Lesson 7: A large fraction faculty are openly anti-Israel, openly support the pro-terror organization SJP, and downplay Hamas. At best, they put advocacy over truth and productive dialogue. However, a plausible interpretation of members’ statements and non-statements is that many are indifferent to or support Hamas’ October 7 massacre and its goal of the genocide of the Jewish People. Either interpretation suggests the public should be seriously concerned about the state of academia.*

*Lesson 8: F4P platformed classical antisemitism. The organization either misunderstands or intentionally misrepresents antisemitism. This illustrates the need to recognize the nexus between anti-Israel discourse and antisemitism, especially in universities.*

#### SFU Institutional Statements

SFU’s leadership has a history of political statements on a range of issues.<sup>27</sup> President Joy Johnson’s bland “Statement on Violence in the Middle East”<sup>28</sup> on October 9 failed to mention any words like “Jewish”, “Hamas”, or “terrorism”.<sup>29</sup> Johnson’s November 9 statement “On finding empathy in an increasingly challenging world”<sup>30</sup> amounted to gaslighting Jewish faculty, staff, and students in light of the hostile, one-sided rhetoric on campus. When SFU PhD Natalie Knight was reported making statements that celebrated the October 7 massacre,<sup>31</sup> SFU stated: “At SFU there is no place for racism, including Islamophobia or anti-Palestinian hate, antisemitism or anti-Israeli hate”,<sup>32</sup> yet only the latter

two categories applied. This illustrates SFU's unwillingness to condemn antisemitism independently of other forms of hate, though SFU has done so for hate directed at other groups.<sup>33</sup>

*Lesson 9: SFU's leadership treats antisemitism as a lesser form of hate.*

*Lesson 10: SFU is unlikely to meaningfully address antisemitism and hateful anti-Zionism without outside intervention.*

Three SFU units – the Labour Studies Program, the School of Communication, and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology – posted official statements on Israel/Palestine in the aftermath of October 7.<sup>34</sup> All were anti-Israel and employed one-sided rhetoric.

*Lesson 11: Entire units are hostile to Israel and put Palestinian advocacy over truth and dialogue.*

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/sfu.sjp/>, <https://www.instagram.com/sfu.sjp/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/stop-and-think-anti-israel-chants-and-what-they-mean>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/C4y30CzPD0S/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/C4y30CzPD0S/?img_index=1)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/C5EpaafSFyH/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/C7Z4xAtyS\\_o/?img\\_index=9](https://www.instagram.com/p/C7Z4xAtyS_o/?img_index=9), <https://www.instagram.com/p/C7Z1GeHv7ci/>, [https://www.cija.ca/add\\_samidoun\\_to\\_the\\_list\\_of\\_terrorist\\_entities](https://www.cija.ca/add_samidoun_to_the_list_of_terrorist_entities).

<sup>6</sup> <https://sfss.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/SFSS-Issues-Policies-2023-12-05.pdf>, Issues Policy 10.

<sup>7</sup> <https://sfss.ca/sfss-council-supports-palestinian-struggle-for-freedom-passes-palestinian-issues-policy/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://go.sfss.ca/clubs/list>; Palestinian Youth Movement SFU did not appear on this list until 2024.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.bnaibrith.ca/independent\\_jewish\\_voices\\_promotes\\_holocaust\\_denial/](https://www.bnaibrith.ca/independent_jewish_voices_promotes_holocaust_denial/)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1308925029672480&set=a.330676700830656>

<sup>11</sup> <https://the-peak.ca/2024/03/palestinian-liberation-referendum-passes/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://the-peak.ca/>, see e.g. <https://honestreporting.ca/petitions/simon-fraser-university-newspaper-continues-its-barrage-of-anti-israel-propaganda/>

<sup>13</sup> I have seen no such events promoted on x.com/SFU or in faculty-wide e-mails.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.sfu.ca/ccms/events-stories/past-events/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.sfu.ca/ccms/events-stories/past-events/2024/forms-of-resistance.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.sfu.ca/ccms/events-stories/past-events/2023/Gaza-in-Context-14.html>, for background on speaker Khalida Jarrar: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-sentences-senior-pfplp-member-to-two-years-in-prison/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.sfufacultyforpalestine.ca/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.sfu.ca/communicators-toolkit/brand/facts-figures.html>, SFU had 1057 faculty as of June 2023.

<sup>19</sup> The SJP representative used the organ-stealing blood libel as a part of their speech; it is refuted by the ADL:

<https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/unfounded-claims-organ-harvesting-reignite-embers-decades-old-hospital-scandal-and>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.sfufacultyforpalestine.ca/motion-on-israelpalestine>, <https://www.sfufacultyforpalestine.ca/motion-to-divest>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.sfufacultyforpalestine.ca/>

<sup>22</sup> [https://isgap.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SJP\\_Report.pdf](https://isgap.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SJP_Report.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g. <https://isgap.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/ISGAP-Working-Papers-Booklet-Cotler-09-copy.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> This occurred during on a faculty discussion e-mail list open to all SFU faculty.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/students-justice-palestine-endorses-terrorism-and-dismantling-zionism-plans-day>

<sup>26</sup> Two examples are Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib <https://x.com/afalkhatib/status/1782241783843553568>, and Hamza Howidy

<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/michael-higgins-this-palestinian-from-gaza-has-no-time-for-campus-protesters>

<sup>27</sup> E.g. see <https://www.sfu.ca/president/statements/community-messages.html>, <https://x.com/SFU/>.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.sfu.ca/president/statements/community-messages/2023/statement-on-violence-in-the-middle-east.html>

<sup>29</sup> Compare to her statement on the Russian invasion of Ukraine: <https://www.sfu.ca/president/statements/community-messages/2022/russian-invasion-of-ukraine.html>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.sfu.ca/president/statements/community-messages/2023/statement-on-finding-empathy-in-an-increasingly-challenging-world.html>

<sup>31</sup> <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/jewish-federation-urges-vancouver-college-to-fire-instructor-who-praised-amas-attacks-1.6624099>

<sup>32</sup> <https://x.com/SFU/status/1719149797112967287>

<sup>33</sup> In comparison, SFU responded to anti-Black hate crime in Buffalo USA by clearly singling out anti-Black racism:

<https://www.sfu.ca/edi/updates/news/2022/supports-and-resources-addressing-anti-black-racism.html>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.sfu.ca/labour/community/news-events/news-2023/sfu-labour-studies-program-statement-against-genocide-in-palestine0.html>; <https://www.sfu.ca/communication/about-cmns/statements-of-solidarity/cmns-statement-on-war-in-palestine.html>; <https://www.sfu.ca/sociology-anthropology/news-events/news/2024/sfu-department-of-sociology-and-anthropology-statement-against-g.html>