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Chair: Ms. Lena Metlege Diab



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• (0815)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.)):
We'll start the meeting.

Welcome, everyone.

[*English*]

I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 104 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on March 21, 2024, the committee is commencing its study on anti-Semitism.

I have a few things to read before we start.

The first is on audio feedback. I want to remind all members and other participants in the room of the following important preventative measures.

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents, which can cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times. As indicated in the communiqué from the Speaker to members on Monday, April 29, the following measures have been taken to help prevent audio feedback incidents.

All earpieces have been replaced by a model that greatly reduces the probability of audio feedback. The new earpieces are black in colour, whereas the former earpieces were grey. Please use only a black, approved earpiece. By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of the meeting. When you're not using your earpiece, please place it face-down in the middle of the sticker that you will find on your table.

Please consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents.

The room layout has been adjusted as much as possible, especially for this morning, to increase the distance between microphones and reduce the chance of feedback from an ambient earpiece.

These measures are in place so that we can conduct our business without interruption, and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters.

Thank you for your co-operation.

For those who don't need the earpiece, again, do not plug it in. That way, it won't cause any feedback for the interpreters.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I note that all witnesses are appearing in person. Members' connections were completed in advance of the meeting.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

This is a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For the benefit of all those attending and viewing the webcast, I will remind you that all briefs can be sent to the committee until May 27, 2024, and they should not exceed three pages in total.

For the benefit of the witnesses, I want you to know that this is how all meetings are conducted. It is nothing personal, but I will let you know right now that we've actually prepared these cards, which I will raise when you have 30 seconds left. I know that when somebody is doing their business, it's hard to look up, but I will keep raising it, and then when the time is up, I'll just raise the "time is up" card and give you a few seconds to wrap up if you haven't already wrapped up. Out of fairness, I will do that for everyone.

All members know this—there are a number who have been on this committee for quite a while, and we have a number who are new—but I will just remind everybody that it's important that we all be compassionate in our conversations and respectful to each other and to the witnesses. I expect that to continue this morning. Thank you very much.

Now I want to welcome the witnesses for today.

As individuals, we have students Rachel Cook, Michael Eshayek and Nicole Nashen; attorney Neil G. Oberman; Nati Pressmann, founder of the Canadian Union of Jewish Students; and Yos Tarshish for Hillel Ontario.

• (0820)

You each have up to five minutes for your opening remarks, after which we will proceed with the rounds of questions. Again, if your comments are six, seven or eight minutes long, don't worry. You will probably get an opportunity to go back to them during the questions.

Just as a reminder, I will say now that if there's anything you want to bring up that you do not have an opportunity to do during the meeting, whether in your opening remarks or during questioning, please feel free to submit it to us in writing, as long as it does not exceed three pages.

Thank you very much.

With that, we will start with five minutes each. I will call on you as I have you here on the paper in front of me.

We'll start with Rachel Cook, please, for five minutes.

Ms. Rachel Cook (Student, As an Individual): Thank you very much, members of the committee, for using your platform to elevate our voices today.

My name is Rachel Cook, and I'm a rising 2L at the University of Alberta faculty of law. I am Jewish and I am a Zionist, but most importantly, I am a Canadian.

On December 6 last year, I asked my law faculty's department of student services if they would be willing to include a menorah in their annual holiday decorations, which included Christmas trees, Christmas garlands and Christmas lights. The reaction to my request was initially positive. However, that evening, I received an email from a member of the administration, stating that I would not be permitted to add my menorah and, furthermore, due to my concerns, the trees would be removed as well.

The administration's reasoning was primarily due to the secularly festive intent. However, I believe there was another, more insidious goal. One day, before I requested adding a menorah, an administrator had wandered around campus dressed up as Santa, handing out candy canes to faculty and students, including me.

I think, however, the faculty and the University of Alberta were concerned that displaying a menorah would be seen as supportive of Israel, which is a politically unpopular opinion on campuses throughout Canada. Someone at the U of A administration made the decision to subtract from the enjoyment of the Christmas season to avoid including Jewish symbols in that display. In my opinion, that's especially problematic, given the number of churches that have been burned throughout this country.

Contrary to my administration's assertion that few, if any, people would notice the removal of the trees, their removal became international news. My story was covered by the National Post, various American channels, including Fox News, and various European and Israeli news agencies. In addition to media requests, I had discussions with federal and provincial politicians, and many concerned members of the legal community. I also heard from Jewish students throughout North America who had had similar experiences on their campus and who were terrified to return to campus after their break.

I sympathize with that. In the weeks leading up to my going viral, there were a number of anti-Israel protests at the time at the U of A, including one advertised as a rally for martyrs.

The director of the U of A's sexual assault centre, Samantha Pearson, was fired after making headlines for signing an open let-

ter, calling the well-documented sexual assault that occurred on October 7 "unverified".

Additionally, Students for Justice in Palestine was permitted to operate openly on campus, contrary to the U of A's statement saying otherwise.

Specifically in the faculty of law, student groups advertised in the Law Students' Association's weekly email that they had partnered with organizations that had been banned in Israel and other countries for their support of Hamas. One of the founders of that club was selected to speak at an awards dinner, where she stated they had a lot to learn from the bravery of Palestinians.

Personally, I accepted a mid-semester move between sections, after a criminal law professor concluded that the system kept Black and indigenous people of colour from their land, and made what I believed was a "Farrakhan-esque" comparison of the system to a roof infested with termites. This professor is still teaching, and would later sign an open letter stating that they "reject the notion that it is antisemitic, hateful, or illegitimate to contextualize the October 7, 2023 attack".

One month after the trees were banned, an EDI feedback meeting took place at the faculty of law. No Jewish student or Jewish faculty member was present at that meeting. According to the minutes, which I received by freedom of information, it was noted that my appearance in the media was one of the greatest attacks to student safety, and that there was space for the faculty to make comments and hold people accountable. I could never have imagined that voices on campus would advocate for holding me accountable for asking to display a menorah or for asking to speak out against anti-Semitism.

I was reminded of all this earlier in the week, when I walked through Rutherford library on my way to my final exam. There was a display of student artwork, including an interactive piece discussing Gaza. Students were invited to write their feelings about history washed over by colonialism on this interactive display. Students had done so, and the display included a swastika, support of a terrorist organization recognized by the Canadian government—the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—and a message reading "Death to ZOGs", implying that the Jews run western governments like Canada and the United States.

After this year, I have been left with the impression that the U of A is more interested in covering up systematic anti-Semitism on campus than addressing it head-on and working toward change. Unfortunately, speaking publicly about documented anti-Semitism has been seen as a greater risk than the behaviour I've worked to draw attention to.

I've heard from numerous members of faculty and classmates and many Albertans who have quietly offered their support for my advocacy.

● (0825)

I have no doubt that when I return to campus, I will be broadly disliked for speaking out, but only by a vocal minority of students.

As you undertake this study, I encourage you to keep the following in mind.

We have been told for years that words are violence, feelings of safety are paramount, and that we should be mindful of actions and interactions, and how our behaviour can harm shared goals on campuses. It is embarrassing for institutions across Canada to admit they have allowed a cultural environment of anti-Semitism to thrive, but light, like the light from a banned menorah or a banned tree, is the best way to shine attention on hate.

Albertans, and Canadians as a whole, are hard-working, ethical people with a deeply ingrained moral compass—

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt you for a moment. I gave you about a minute more, but that's okay. You'll get a chance to give us your feedback and recommendations during questions.

Thank you for that.

We'll go to Michael Eshayek, please.

Mr. Michael Eshayek (Student, As an Individual): Hi. Thank you for inviting me today and for leading a national conversation on the disturbing and troubling rise in anti-Semitism on university campuses since the barbaric terrorist attack on Israel by Hamas on October 7.

My family fled persecution in Iraq, settling in Israel, where I was born. As a teenager, I often visited my great-aunt who had moved to Canada, and I fell in love with Montreal. I arrived at Concordia to study finance two years ago and felt right at home. I became part of a global community comprising students of different backgrounds and cultures, bringing unique perspectives to our studies in a respectful and open manner. It was what learning was meant to be.

In this spirit, I became one of the founders of the StartUp Nation, with the goal of bringing Israel to our campus through business, innovation, culture and technology. Little did we know that we would soon become leaders in the fight against anti-Semitism on campus.

Let me share some milestone dates with you.

On October 8, a day after the horrible attack, SPHR Concordia posted, "Last night, the resistance in Gaza led a heroic"—heroic—"attack against the occupation and has taken over 30 hostages."

On October 25, hundreds of students walked out of class at 1.30 p.m. and participated in an anti-Semitic sit-in in solidarity with Palestine in Concordia's main lobby while chanting "From the river to the sea," "Intifada now," and "Resistance is justified." These chants are threatening and a call for the genocide of the Jewish people over and over again.

On November 8, 30 Jewish students made a Shabbat table with empty chairs on campus to raise awareness of the hostage crisis. As a result, about 300 pro-Hamas students and faculty harassed, threatened and physically accosted us while yelling, "Go back to Poland" and "Kike", among other threats and chants. Personally, my life was threatened, as I was told, "You'd better get off campus or you will not get to see tomorrow."

On November 23, a second anti-Semitic walkout took place. All participants were fully masked, screaming, "There is only one solution! Intifada revolution!"

On December 13, students from across Montreal came to the main building on our downtown campus, chanting anti-Semitic rants and waving offensive signs and banners with things such as "Globalize the Intifada", which is a clear call for another October 7 or another 9/11.

On March 4, the administration cancelled our event because we were hosting three reservists on a diplomatic mission to speak about Israel's journey toward stability and peace. The event was then moved to the Jewish federation, the Federation CJA, where pro-Hamas students, such as SPHR Concordia, again came together to physically block all access to the building while again chanting anti-Semitic slogans. We were trapped in the conference centre for four hours while police were on site, trying to get us out.

On March 12, Jewish students in the Hillel club-room, which is the only Jewish club-room on campus, were harassed by masked individuals who were banging on the walls and chanting, "All Zionists are racists. All Zionists are terrorists." Again, Jewish students were trapped and traumatized.

On April 8 and April 10, an Israeli scholar was invited by the Israel Institute to speak about the importance of Arab representation in the Israeli Knesset. In response, demonstrators physically blocked access to the classroom.

Our greatest disappointment is that the leadership of Concordia sat idly by, ducking and refusing to enforce its own policies and step in to ensure the safety and well-being of Jewish students. The leadership seems intent on muzzling us, and has certainly shown an insensitivity to our views and concerns.

Our policy on campus safety and security forbids demonstrators from hiding their faces by wearing masks, yet at all events the perpetrators were masked and yet, to date, have faced no consequences.

• (0830)

The administration has also not launched proceedings against the instigators of recent anti-Semitic demonstrations. We have, for example, indicated that a part-time student at Concordia since 2016 has broken our code of conduct. He is on campus and is a known agitator. The student has been caught on film threatening and attacking students and staff on campus, and has been arrested twice off campus since those incidents. His posts on social media also call for violence against Jews. He has said—

The Chair: I'll let you finish that sentence.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: —“Death to Israel. Kill them all. Allahu Akbar. Bomb them.” Despite this, the administration is turning a blind eye—

The Chair: I will interrupt you now.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Nicole Nashen, please.

Ms. Nicole Nashen (Student, As an Individual): “Viva viva Intifada.” “Go back to Poland.” “Yemen, Yemen, make us proud, turn another ship around.” “Resistance is justified when people are occupied.”

These are just a few of the hateful chants heard blaring across campus that have caused me and thousands of other students great pain and immense fear over the past seven months.

My name is Nicole Nashen. I just finished my second year of law school at McGill University. I am the granddaughter of immigrants who came to Canada seeking a better life for their children. My grandparents were so proud when I was admitted to McGill for law school, but are now horrified by the rampant anti-Semitism that I and my Jewish peers are experiencing on campus. Jewish students in Montreal have been intimidated by hateful posters glorifying violence and terrorism, and by protesters chanting for the destruction of our ancestral homeland.

As Michael said, on October 8, clubs funded by McGill and Concordia universities posted on Instagram, “Last night, the resistance in Gaza led a heroic attack against the occupation and has taken over 30 hostages.”

These are the same groups that have been organizing the campus protests and the current encampment at McGill University. They have not tried to hide their hateful and anti-Semitic intent. Our universities have chosen to turn a blind eye, rather than stand up for their Jewish students.

• (0835)

[*Translation*]

A student at the Université de Montréal said that, before October 7, her Jewish identity always seemed natural and readily and wholeheartedly accepted. However, at this time, a cloud of doubt or unease looms over her sense of belonging among her peers at school as a Jewish person.

[*English*]

As Michael said, on November 8 at Concordia University, my alma mater, where I served on the Concordia Student Union and as the president of Hillel, Jewish students were violently attacked during a tabling event to raise awareness for the hostages. They were assaulted by an anti-Semitic mob, which was only brought to an end by police intervention. Adam Goren, VP of Israel Affairs for StartUp Nation Concordia, said that the events of November 8 had fundamentally changed the way he felt on campus, making him feel unsafe and nervous to attend classes, with his constantly looking over his shoulder. That feeling had persisted to this day.

The right to peaceful protest is a fundamental tenet of democracy, and criticizing the policies and actions of the Israeli government is not inherently anti-Semitic. Having said that, the sign on the McGill encampment facing Sherbrooke Street that reads, “Agitate, escalate, shut it down” is not criticism of the Israeli government, nor is it peaceful, and the sign on the McGill encampment that reads, “No Zionists Allowed” is overtly anti-Semitic.

Zionism should not be controversial. It is simply the belief in Jewish self-determination in our indigenous homeland, and it does not preclude the existence of a Palestinian state too.

While anti-Israel activists on campus tolerate the religious aspects of Judaism, they have created a litmus test by which Jewish students are told we must denounce our affiliation to our ancestral homeland in order to be accepted. They do this by distinguishing us as Zionists. However, Judaism is more than just a religion. We are also a nation, an ethnic group and a community. Our identity is a package deal that cannot be dismembered through western standards. Thus, Jews as a religious group have been deemed acceptable, while Zionists are demonized for refusing to conform and give up the package deal that is our identity—

The Chair: Nicole, slow down a bit. The interpreters are having a bit of a hard time. It's okay. I'll give you a few extra seconds to slow down a bit.

Ms. Nicole Nashen: Okay. Thank you.

Campus protesters have simply replaced the word “Jew” with “Zionist” in order to make our exclusion and intimidation more palatable. Would a sign on the McGill campus reading, “No Jews Allowed” ever be tolerated? It is therefore essential that the Government of Canada recognize that the intimidation of Zionists is, effectively, the intimidation of Jews.

Yes, there are some Jews who are not Zionists, and they are entitled to their own opinions. However, as Prime Minister Trudeau stated himself on Yom HaShoah, the vast majority of Jews are Zionists. It is an integral part of our identity, and it needs to be legally recognized as such so that our peers cannot continue to use this label to exclude us from the universities that we deserve to be full members of.

Unfortunately, our universities are currently failing to protect us. According to Elia Nissan and Julia Langleben, co-presidents of the StartUp Nation McGill, despite McGill's commitment to inclusion and zero tolerance for hate on campus, they have completely failed to uphold the promises they've made to the McGill community.

We did not get to this point overnight. The consistent failure of our universities to take action against the hate taking place on our campuses has emboldened anti-Israel activists to become more radical. Our universities must take a stand, and where they fail to adequately protect their Jewish students, they must be held accountable.

Despite the intimidation of Jewish students on campus, we have consistently embodied the resilient flame of our ancestors, who refused to give up their Judaism to be accepted in the diaspora. With us, we have the strength of every generation of Jews who chose to stand up against anti-Semitism and who persevered, and I'm confident that we will too.

The Chair: Fabulous. You're under five minutes. That's law students. I was there. I get it. Thank you very much.

Neil Oberman, please go ahead.

• (0840)

Mr. Neil G. Oberman (Attorney, As an Individual): Hello. My name is Neil Oberman. I'm an attorney at Spiegel Sohmer in Montreal.

I did prepare a speech, but after listening to these students, all of you should understand why this is so important. I, as a frontline attorney, have had the unfortunate pleasure—and I will tell you about this unpleasure—of having to go to court to take actions to protect these people who are here today. There is a message.

[*Translation*]

Canadian and Quebec values are under attack. This serious issue in Quebec and Canada should be addressed today, without restriction and without question. Our values as Canadians and Quebecers are at stake.

Mr. Fortin, you can see that people are here to plead their case.

[*English*]

As a lawyer, I've had the ability to take these cases and to try to do something. You might have known that I took injunctions against McGill to try to get rid of the encampment. I'm not going to comment on the judgment. I'm not going to tell you whether it was right or wrong. The fact that it had to be taken in itself speaks loudly to what's going on. On March 4, 2024, I had to take an injunction in order to save our community.

Now, I am no hero. These are the heroes, these people who come before you and who put their names out there. These are the people whom we want to strive to protect. However, there is a fundamental issue, ladies and gentlemen and parliamentarians.

[*Translation*]

I'm speaking to all Quebecers. We should make changes. The law matters, but more importantly, it must be respected and enforced.

[*English*]

You can create all the laws you want. I'm sure you want to talk about that, and we're going to get into that, but if people don't respect the laws on the books currently, there is no value. Anti-Semitism is a sickness, and it has to be eradicated. However, what's more important is ignorance and the inability to understand things, which is also a sickness. Legislators can't legislate love, and they can't tell you how to think, but they can legislate against hate.

It's your job here today to legislate against hate. I'm not going to give you a course in law—you're the legislature—but I can tell you that every student who has come to me has said to me, "Neil, why aren't people enforcing the law?" The law of Concordia, the law of Dawson, the law of Vanier, the law of Canada and the law of Quebec—we are a country of law. The rule of law is not to be trifled with. It is the core of our identity.

I want to point out the top 10 list of the worst things—besides the things these young people have dealt with—that I, Neil Oberman, have had to deal with.

A student goes to school in the morning and gets dropped off by his mom, and the first thing that happens is a group of kids come to him and say, "Do you believe in Palestine? Are you against Israel?" He says no, and they start beating him. What does the teacher supervising the children do? They say, "Keep beating him until he says Palestine." This is not what Quebec and Canada are about. I am concerned, and you should be concerned.

The future is not Neil Oberman; the future is Nicole and Rachel and Nati and Michael. They're the future, but when you take their futures away, you take Canada's future away. That is why I'm urging each and every one of you, when you look at what's going on, to come down to the level of the students and see what they're doing.

One of the other issues that has unfortunately been raised during what I've been doing is that people don't want to stand up. They're scared of being heard.

Do you know what I say, Madam Chair? If you do nothing, you get nothing. I choose to do something. I am here. They are here. I applaud you. I'm not here for them; I'm here for you. I can tell you this: When you go back and you deliberate on what's next for you to do, take three things into account: What does the law say, what do the students say and what does your heart say? What does your heart tell you about what we as Canadians want to be doing? Do we want to have to do this?

[*Translation*]

Do people need to hire a lawyer to go to school? It's ridiculous and unacceptable.

Personally, I protest using the law that applies to everyone. I've requested injunctions, which were rejected. However, people listened to me because they listened to the students.

[English]

We're going to bring this change because this association of students and your committee have the power—but there is no power in being quiet.

I'm going to stay within my time. I'm going to show you what the future is, ladies and gentlemen. It's a blank page. You have the opportunity, along with these people, to create a future for all of us that will be written not in blood and not in hate but in love, which you can't legislate. However, with respect, you must understand that if we don't act now, we will not be able to stop the tide of anti-Semitism. It's an illness, and it's for this parliament and our government to stop talking and start doing.

[Translation]

Personally, I'll be there all the way for these students.

Thank you.

• (0845)

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

We'll go to Nati Pressmann, please.

Ms. Nati Pressmann (Founder, Canadian Union of Jewish Students): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the committee for this critical study on anti-Semitism.

My name is Nati Pressmann. I'm a first-generation Canadian Jew in my third year at Queen's University. I'm the first person in my family to be born in a country where I'm given the same rights as other citizens, despite the fact that I am Jewish.

I've always been grateful for the opportunities and peace that Canada has given me and my family. However, that peace has been blemished by anti-Semitism. Although anti-Semitism has always been present in Canada, including at universities, and Jews have consistently represented the community most frequently victimized by hate crimes, I've seen the situation get exponentially worse since October 7.

As vice-president of the World Union of Jewish Students, I observed a void in Canada. There was an absence of a national democratic organization for Jewish students. The CUJS, or Canadian Union of Jewish Students, was established to fill this gap by creating a platform for Jewish students across Canada to elect representatives who can advocate for our interests and address our concerns with university administrators, governmental bodies and Jewish and non-Jewish organizations. This need has never been greater.

On October 7, our Instagram feeds exploded with videos of Hamas's murderous assault on Israeli civilians. Our Jewish peers were horrified. They shared videos of Naama Levy being forced into a jeep by a Hamas gunman, with blood staining the crotch of her sweat pants.

Many non-Jewish students instead shared posts that celebrated the killings and purported to justify Hamas's barbarity as resistance in decolonization. A student at Queen's University wrote in a blog

that it was a glorious day. That same student was given an award for equity.

I remind the committee that these incidents of outright violence and hate speech were taking place before Israel even responded to Hamas's murderous assault.

Our universities should be places of learning, critical thinking and respectful dialogue. Instead, they have become home to unsanctioned protests featuring anti-Semitic rhetoric.

We frequently hear, "There is only one solution! Intifada revolution!" For Jews, the Intifada was a series of suicide bombings that claimed the lives of up to 1,400 Israelis. Israelis like me, and the children of Israelis, grew up learning how to stay away from unattended baggage in case it was a bomb.

Across the country, Jewish students who used to wear Jewish symbols, like the Magen David, now hide them as they walk past protests, including my friends who used to wear kippot, who now instead wear baseball caps going to class. This is not because we are any less proud to be Jewish, but because our universities have allowed an environment where being openly Jewish could be a threat to our safety.

We've had to have our Jewish pride be inside of us because we are scared of being physically harmed by other students on our campuses.

Some CUJS members have relatives among the hostages in Gaza. Nonetheless, they are exposed to abuse that treats those murdered and taken hostage as perpetrators, rather than the victims they are.

Student-led groups at Queen's, McMaster, the University of Alberta and others shared posts that accused Israel of fabricating reports of sexual assaults that the family members saw of female hostages. My own friends and CUJS members saw these posts while their own family members were still in Hamas captivity, and those family members who are hostages are young women.

First-year students living away from home for the first time feel unsafe in residence. At Dalhousie, a first year Jewish student wrote "Never again" in honour of Holocaust Remembrance Day on a personal whiteboard that every student is given outside of their dorm room. When they returned to their dorm, the word "Never" had been erased.

At Queen's, first-year students have had over five mezuzoth torn down in the Leggett residence building. This is just one singular building and repeated hate crimes that Jewish students have had to face.

We have also seen frequent acts of Holocaust distortion, which is also incredibly concerning, not just because of Holocaust memory, but because of the rise of Holocaust denial and distortion, and the fact that many Canadian Jews are the descendants of Holocaust survivors.

A nursing student at the University of Manitoba posted images equating the actions of Israel to those of the Nazis in the Holocaust. The Students for Justice in Palestine group at the University of Regina held posters saying that one Holocaust is not equal to another. Similar signage has been seen at many other rallies in Calgary, Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto, Saskatoon and Halifax.

All of these incidents result from the normalization of anti-Semitic rhetoric through inaction by university administrators, who fail to use even their own policies and their own codes of conduct to act against anti-Semitism on their own campuses. Administrators are entitled to act when students and/or faculty create a poisonous campus environment, but we have seen little to no action taken.

The increase in anti-Semitism is deeply troubling. Jewish students experience fear and anxiety. We, as a society, need to support them. We, as Canadians, need to support them, as Canadian values demand no less.

- (0850)

With over 300 members from over 20 university campuses, CUJS will play its part in providing such support for Jewish students who face anti-Semitism on campus and beyond. Now it's your turn to lift up our voices so that all Jewish students in Canada will be able to feel safe in their places of learning.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Yos Tarshish.

Mr. Yos Tarshish (Director, Hillel Queen's, Hillel Ontario): Honourable chair and members of the committee, I appreciate your commitment to addressing the significant and growing challenge of hatred in our society, particularly the escalating rise in Jew hatred we're experiencing on campuses.

I'm here to speak up on behalf of thousands of Jewish students across this country. My name is Yos Tarshish. I'm the director of Hillel Queen's, and I'm here representing Hillels on campuses all over the country.

I've spent about 15 years deeply immersed in Jewish student communities in Canada and around the world, and this tenure's afforded me a broad insight into the patterns of anti-Semitism, particularly in a university setting. It's allowed me to observe its fluctuations and to see when it rises and when it falls.

Anti-Semitism is not a new or novel phenomenon here in Canada. From as early as the 1920s, Canadian Jews faced systematic barriers to entry into Canadian universities. Universities like McGill only rescinded their numerous classist quotas on Jewish students in the 1960s.

In 2009, Jewish York University students had to barricade themselves inside their Hillel building to keep themselves away from a violent mob.

In 2022, Dr. Ayelet Kuper's landmark report into anti-Semitism within the University of Toronto's Temerty school of medicine uncovered really deep-seated biases that show how prejudice infiltrates even the most prestigious of academic institutions.

Sadly, these are really just the tip of the iceberg, and Jewish students are facing really terrible things every single day. We're observing this anti-Semitism on campus taking three main forms. The first is both verbal and social harassment. The second is physical and symbolic acts. The third is disqualification and exclusion.

For the first form, harassment, in February, a Jewish student walking on campus at York University had his picture taken from behind. That picture was then uploaded onto TikTok, where thousands of comments mocked his choice of kippah, or head covering. There were thousands of comments.

A story I shared yesterday in the press conference we held follows on from the story Nati shared about five mezuzahs being removed from residence buildings. In January, at the Residence Society general assembly, which is the democratically elected student government for 6,000 students in Queen's residence, when the question was asked by a first-year Jewish student of how—

The Chair: Mr. Tarshish, go a bit slower.

Mr. Yos Tarshish: At the Residence Society general assembly, when candidates were asked by a first-year Jewish student what they were going to do to fight anti-Semitism in residences, given that, at this point, four mezuzahs had been removed, no one gave a good answer. The most disturbing thing was that an audible ripple of laughter went through the room the moment the question was asked.

Anti-Semitic rhetoric is not limited to students. We've already heard terrible things coming out of professors within their classrooms and outside of them. I think the one that really shocked me was when a Concordia professor showed up at McGill and screamed at Jewish students, "Go back to Poland, sharmuta," which is an Arabic derogatory curse-word.

In terms of physical aggression, we've had lots of examples of that tonight. At Western University, a student who hosted a Jewish event had rocks thrown through the window of her student house that night. It's her private student home. Physical assaults and threats have become alarmingly common. I've seen several videos in the last weeks from university campuses that have disturbed me greatly.

The final bit is disqualification. This, to me, is really the most pernicious form of anti-Semitism that we're seeing on campuses. It's the core demand of this encampment movement right now. Removing all representations of Zionism from campus has become... The mask has slipped. We have gone from, "We need a ceasefire" to, "Hillel must be removed from campus, because Hillel is a Zionist cultural institution."

So says CUPE 3903, the union of TAs at York University. It provided TAs at York with a tool kit on how they could bring Palestine into the classroom. It included as a recommendation that Hillel should not be allowed on campus.

I remind you that we have been an organization serving Canadian Jewish students for more than 80 years.

I'm proud to live in Canada, and it pains me to witness this trend in a country that is known for its inclusivity and diversity. While anti-Semitism is indeed an ancient hatred, its current resurgence on Canadian campuses is not merely a recurrence, but an intensification. It's threatening the safety and well-being of Jewish students and, by extension, the integrity of our educational institutions.

If we stand by while history's shadows lengthen into our halls of learning, we fail not only those directly affected, but also the very ideals of diversity, inclusion and justice we aspire to uphold.

It is urgent that we act now. The cost of inaction is the well-being of our future generations here in this country. Let us not be the ones who look back and wish that we had done more when we had the chance. Let's ensure that all students, regardless of background or belief, can pursue their education in an environment free from intimidation, hate and fear.

Thank you.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now open the floor to questions. The way it works is we will start with six-minute rounds for each of the four political parties.

I will begin with Mr. Morantz, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just have to say thank you to all of you for coming here and sharing your stories. I don't think anyone could hear them without really being horrified. I want to say how brave you all are for coming here and telling your stories. I know it will make a difference.

I can't help but feel that this is an historic meeting. We are finally trying to deal with the issue of anti-Semitism in this country.

Mr. Oberman, you talked about the blank page and moving forward and legislating, but I want to turn the clock back to October 7 and the period between then and now. The reality is that the actions of our government have not made things better. They've actually made things far worse. I'm going to take you through a number of situations.

For example, just after October 7, the Prime Minister publicly scolded Israel and the IDF for bombing a hospital in Gaza without having all of the necessary information. It came out after that the cause was actually misfired rockets from inside Gaza, and that the IDF had nothing to do with it.

Still, this was the Prime Minister of Canada.

He directed his ambassador to the UN to vote for a blatantly anti-Israel ceasefire motion at the UN, siding with the anti-Israel UN

mob. He rewarded Hamas by blocking arms sales to Israel after Hamas brutally murdered 1,200 civilians and took 200 more hostages. Worse, he failed to remove the arms ban even after Iran launched a direct attack on Israel's territory with hundreds of missiles and drones.

He rewarded Hamas by reinstating funding to UNRWA, even though UNRWA employees participated in the October 7 attacks.

He failed to unequivocally condemn the frivolous genocide convention claim launched by South Africa at the ICJ.

I think the worst thing of all, which I was present in the House for, is that he voted with his caucus, present company excepted, for a motion in Parliament that actually punished our democratic ally, Israel, and rewarded the terrorists of Hamas. Worse than all of that, at the end of that vote, almost every Liberal, present company excepted, stood up and gave themselves a standing ovation, with the NDP, in the House of Commons because they were proud of the fact that they passed this motion.

Therefore, Mr. Oberman, would you agree that the actions, and not just the inaction, of this Liberal government since October 7 have fanned the flames of anti-Semitism in Canada and exacerbated the problem on university campuses?

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: That is a great question, but you forgot one important thing, Mr. Morantz. When our Prime Minister invites into the House of Commons, a place of democracy and justice, a former member of the Ukrainian Nazi Party, you might not want to send that type of message to the people of Canada.

I'm no politician, sir. I'm a simple lawyer trying to do a difficult job. I'm a collections lawyer by trade, but my community came to me on March 4 and asked me to collect back their dignity, so what I'm going to do is collect back the dignity of our people. What I can tell you is people take a cue from their leaders, as they should.

● (0900)

[*Translation*]

It's vital to determine who's in charge, what the message is, whether the message is clear and whether people are receiving unclear messages. When you send messages that aren't clear,

[English]

When you send messages that are not clear, that's what happens: It creates ambiguity, it fuels the fire, it stokes TikTok and it stokes on-line hate. Do you know what hate is? Hate is like a disease. When you feed it with the wrong words and the wrong impressions, you create the atmosphere, and then you say, "Oh, we need to correct it. It's broken."

It's broken because you broke it. Do you now want to fix something that you broke? Great, but look at these poor students. Their entire university career is going to be marred by threats and violence. What does that leave us in the future? It leaves us with a blank page.

However, sir, I agree with you. Government must be more responsible, because responsibility starts in your House. Clean up your House, and people will follow suit.

Thank you.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you.

It's the same question for Ms. Cook: Do you think, given what I've outlined, that government has made the problem worse?

Ms. Rachel Cook: I think the EDI system has made the problem worse. Like I stated, the "equity, diversity and inclusion" meeting did not include Jewish people when they were discussing what to do about a Jewish person complaining about anti-Semitism on campus.

I think it can start at the top, but it also starts in institutions and in massively funding EDI programming, such that, quite literally, when I asked who decides who is in these EDI meetings—is it a percentage of population?—their response was, well, it's the groups that deserve equity and deserve inclusion. Well, who decides that?

Mr. Marty Morantz: I agree a hundred per cent.

Mr. Eshayek, do you agree with my assessment?

Mr. Michael Eshayek: Yes, I agree.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you.

Ms. Pressmann.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: I would just like to say that the average Canadians who are on our campuses who are spewing hatred against Jews aren't necessarily supportive of the actions that the governments have to take, because they think they're not enough. The persons who are calling for an intifada until revolution still think our government is too pro-Israel.

While we're talking about particular policy, I also want to keep in mind that's really the reality on our campuses, and I think we need to work towards talking about how we can actually deal with anti-Semitism on our campus. Regarding EDI, I think what we should do is try to incorporate more Jews into EDI because I think we deserve to be in those spaces, rather than get rid of them as a whole.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you.

If I have one second left, Ms. Nashen, do you agree?

The Chair: The time is up, Mr. Morantz—

Ms. Nicole Nashen: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Morantz, the time is up.

I will now go to Mr. Housefather, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here. I asked for this study to happen. I moved this motion for this study because I believe the vast majority of Canadians are good and care very much about our Jewish communities and they don't understand what's happening on campus.

I was very much hoping for a non-partisan study that would allow the voices of Jewish students to come forward. That was what these meetings were meant to do and that's what I intend to use my time and my questions to ask for. I want to hear about your experiences.

Ms. Nashen, when you see a sign at your campus at the encampment, which McGill has declared on multiple occasions is in violation of McGill's code of conduct, that reads, "No Zionists allowed", do you feel welcome at McGill?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: My grandfather was born in a refugee camp outside of Yemen in the British protectorate of Aden because Jews were being persecuted, and my grandmother was born in Morocco when Jews were being persecuted, and Israel was the only country that took them in. I would not be alive today if it were not for the State of Israel. When I see a sign on my campus saying "No Zionists allowed", that means no Jews allowed. That is terrifying.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Ms. Pressman, when you hear the words "from the river to the sea" that are being chanted on campus, what does that mean to you?

Ms. Nati Pressmann: To me, it means the annihilation of the State of Israel and a complete denial of historical fact about Jews belonging to the State of Israel. For me, a lot of people who are saying it are the same people who often engage in other violent chants, such as "intifada until revolution". That's how it feels to me.

Israel has always been my homeland, and it's the homeland of my family. It's the place that my grandfather faced intimidation for by the KGB because he was a proud Zionist and because he wanted to move to Israel.

Those sayings deny what Israel has done for my family and what Israel has done for other Jews, including those in this room.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Ms. Cook, when you hear "Globalize the intifada. There is only one solution; intifada, revolution", what does it mean to you when you walk onto the University of Alberta campus?

Ms. Rachel Cook: For the first time in my life, it makes me question if I belong in this country.

• (0905)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Eshayek, when you walk by the McGill illegal encampment and you get told to go back to Iraq, or when other people are told to go back to Poland, what does that make you feel that people are saying?

Mr. Michael Eshayek: I want to say about the encampment at McGill that I went there once or twice to see what was going on and I stood far away. Like you said, a bunch of people came to me, a bunch of jihadists came to me, and said, “Go back to Europe.” I said, “But my family is from Iraq.” They said, “So go back to Iraq.” Unfortunately, I can’t go back to Iraq and also—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Pretty much every Jew has been expelled from Iraq.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: From Iraq and from almost every Arab country.

Also, when I came home, I found out that they made a video against me, a three-minute video just about me.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I just want to know how you felt. Does it make you feel excluded?

Mr. Michael Eshayek: I felt threatened and excluded.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you.

Ms. Nashen, when you were at McGill and you see McGill professors going to the illegal encampment and supporting the people doing the encampment, how does that make you feel if you have to go to a class being taught by that professor?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: I took public international law last semester, and my professor signed a letter that said, “We reject the notion that it is antisemitic...to contextualize the October 7th, 2023 attack”.

On October 7, my aunt and uncle hid in their home in Kfar Aza for 30 hours as Hamas terrorists massacred their village. About 10% of their village was massacred. Their house does not exist anymore. It is rubble. They hid in their safe room for 30 hours, and we had no contact with them. We didn’t know if they were alive and we didn’t know if they were hostages, and there is no context for that, but I had to go back to that class for the rest of the semester.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: When you went to complain to the administration at McGill, did they treat you and your complaint with any respect and dignity, or did they basically disregard your comments?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: Each office I went to told me it was a different office’s jurisdiction. I spent about two weeks going from the dean of students’ office to the accessibility office, which sent me back to the dean of students’ office, which sent me back to the accessibility office. They just were not able to fix my issue.

I was forced to go back to a class that I felt unsafe in because nobody could help me.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Ms. Cook, when you asked for a menorah—it seems like it’s a very simple request to display a menorah, a Jewish symbol of hope at Hanukkah—and instead, the university took down the Christmas trees, did people around you blame the Jew for having deprived them of Christmas?

Ms. Rachel Cook: They did until I went to the media, and then I think my story got out there. It shows they’re willing to subject Jewish students to anti-Semitism and hurt Christian students at the same time to make sure that they don’t look like they’re supporting Jewish students or Israel.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Ms. Pressmann, you’re the founder of a national organization. Do the interactions between Jewish stu-

dents and administrators when they have issues like this—based on the stories that Ms. Nashen and Ms. Cook told—seem familiar to you in terms of what your membership is dealing with when they complain to administrations?

Ms. Nati Pressmann: We’ve had students who had the same situation. They were just told it’s another person’s jurisdiction. These are things that last for months. By the time they’re told to go and meet with the right person, it’s apparently too late to deal with that incident.

It’s very similar to what we’re hearing on campuses across the country, where Jewish students feel unsafe. When they try to use university support and try to use university staff to support them, they’re not helped at all and they’re pointed in the wrong direction multiple times.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Tarshish, based on your experience of Jewish students....

Am I done? I’m done.

The Chair: Mr. Housefather, that’s six minutes. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I would also like to thank all the students here today. I agree with my colleague, Mr. Morantz, that they have shown a great deal of courage in coming here. I know that it isn’t necessarily easy. I’m very grateful to them.

Mr. Oberman, I must tell you that I agree with just about everything you said—

The Chair: Mr. Fortin, one moment, please. I think that someone said that there wasn’t any interpretation.

[English]

Do you have interpretation?

Okay. Yes. Give us just one moment.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin, could you say a few words, please?

• (0910)

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: One, two. One, two.

[English]

No?

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: I can translate.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I would agree, but it’s part of my job to make sure that everyone can understand in French or in English, so I apologize for that.

The Chair: Let me suspend for a minute, please.

• (0910) _____ (Pause) _____

• (0915)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We'll now resume the meeting.

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I would like to thank all the students here today. I agree with my colleague, Mr. Morantz, that it takes a certain amount of courage to appear before a House of Commons committee and report unacceptable situations.

I see that people can't hear what I'm saying. There still doesn't seem to be any interpretation, Madam Chair.

The Chair: No?

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Can anyone give us an explanation?

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: Can I do it?

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: No, thank you. That's kind of you to offer, Mr. Oberman.

[*English*]

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I ask that all the time. They never allow it.

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: I'm just trying to be a good Canadian citizen.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: The clerk says that it works.

You may proceed, Mr. Fortin.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Can anyone explain to Ms. Cook how the devices work?

The Chair: Yes. Okay.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Ms. Cook still isn't receiving the interpretation. We're no longer talking about anti-Semitism here, but rather about an efficiency issue affecting bilingualism in the House of Commons.

Sorry, but I must take a hard line on this matter.

[*English*]

Don't be sorry.

The thing is, you're not the only one. People are watching us and listening to us, and everyone should be able to understand what we're saying in French or in English.

[*Translation*]

As I was saying, bilingualism matters in the House of Commons.

Can you hear us, Ms. Cook?

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: The translation works well on television. It's important that the audience understands.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Perhaps it depends on what I'm saying.

• (0920)

The Chair: Mr. Fortin, can you give it another try?

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Good morning, everyone. I speak French. Bilingualism matters in the House of Commons. We're all happy to know that we can speak both English and French, and that everyone can hear us properly. Is that the case? Do I need to speak again? I could also sing Canada's national anthem. Since these are new devices, they probably need some fine-tuning.

Is it working for everyone?

The Chair: I can hear you just fine.

[*English*]

I can't speak for other people.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Since I'm not good with technology, I can't do anything more.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Fortin.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I can start from the top, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes. Please start from the top.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Good morning, everyone.

I'm sorry about these inconveniences. We always try to respect bilingualism on Parliament Hill, which sometimes means making a few small compromises.

For the third time, I would like to say how happy I am to see all the students here to tell us about the situation on their university campuses. Needless to say, we find the situation unacceptable.

In my opinion, a university campus is a place to learn, but also a place to exchange views. Everyone should feel safe and free to exchange views, even vigorously at times. That's fine. However, this must be done respectfully. The situations described here are neither respectful nor acceptable.

I also told Mr. Oberman that I agree with just about everything that he said. I was particularly struck by his comment that laws must be created, but they must also be enforced. This certainly applies to anti-Semitism.

Our Criminal Code is already relatively thick. We can make it even thicker and add endless provisions. However, in my humble opinion, this won't solve the problems on the ground. I think that the emphasis should be placed on respect.

As legislators, I believe that we have a greater responsibility to set an example by treating each other with respect and dignity.

There are examples of foul language unbecoming of a parliamentarian and a respectful citizen. I won't quote these examples, but they have happened here, in public, on Parliament Hill. I find them deplorable every time. I'll say it again here.

This shouldn't happen. Unfortunately, it may be connected to the rise in foul language and unacceptable behaviour happening everywhere. This is particularly true these days on university campuses.

I apologize for the long introduction. I believe that it's important to share my thoughts on the matter.

That said, it was good to hear from Mr. Oberman. I would also like to hear from the students.

The whole situation on campuses is unacceptable. You can keep coming back to it, but it won't get us anywhere.

What do you think is the reason for this situation?

Obviously, the tragic events of October 7, 2023, acted as a catalyst.

Why is it hard for you to show up on university campuses and discuss topics that interest you without falling victim to this exclusionary behaviour and these unexplained or badly explained criticisms?

Mr. Eshayek, what's the reason for the current situation on campuses?

• (0925)

[English]

Mr. Michael Eshayek: I think a lot of it has to do with Jew hatred. I'm always saying that I think I'm more pro-Palestinian than the people who are screaming the things they're screaming, because I actually want the people in Gaza to have a decent life, but in order to do so, we have to get rid of Hamas.

I didn't see these people standing outside and screaming and chanting when Syria killed—murdered—500,000 Arabs or when Egypt didn't open the borders for the people of Gaza. I didn't see them going into the streets and protesting about it. I think it has everything to do with Jew hatred and it has nothing to do with the people in Gaza. It's sad to see.

I also think that once you let criminals commit crimes without any consequences, they will continue to commit crimes. Once we see university administrations and university presidents taking steps and doing something against it, we will be able to stop it. We have to make sure that the university presidents are going to do something and are standing up against the criminals.

That's my opinion.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Eshayek.

Ms. Nashen, what are your thoughts on the same issue?

[English]

Ms. Nicole Nashen: There's a notion in Western society that Jews are white and that white people are the oppressors. But Jews are not white; we're an indigenous people who come from the land of Israel. We're demonized on campus as being the oppressors, such that people don't want to partake in conversation with us. They're able to label us as Zionists rather than as Jews, and to make that the

cause of the ills of the world. We have seen this throughout history: Jews have been demonized for the ills of the world. We were communists and we were capitalists and we were vermin and we took over democratic institutions, and today we're called Zionists.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you.

Ms. Nashen, in your opinion, do we need to make a distinction among the Canadian Jewish community, the Jewish community in Israel, the Jewish community around the world and the Israeli government, which a number of us are criticizing? Is there a distinction, or should everyone be lumped together, in your opinion?

[English]

Ms. Nicole Nashen: In this room, we have people from all different political parties who are all Canadians and who don't all have the same opinions on the actions of the Canadian government, so why would it not be the same for Jews and for Israelis?

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Garrison, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm going to have a shorter preamble, I hope, than Mr. Fortin did. That would be the normal practice.

I want to start by joining Mr. Housefather to say that when I voted in favour of this study, I naively assumed that this committee might be able to set aside relentless partisanship to shine a light on this problem and to search for solutions. I am disappointed at some of the things that have happened early on in this room, and I hope we will get our focus back onto the problem of anti-Semitism and the problems that Jewish students are facing.

Like anyone who has ties to the Jewish community, I am not surprised—I have ties in my riding and I have long, historical family ties to Jewish communities—but it's still shocking to hear all of you here, from various backgrounds and various institutions, reporting that the same thing is happening in Canada. I thank you for bringing this to the attention of the public. I thank you for taking the risk you're taking personally, because I know there's a personal risk of retaliation and harassment as a result of your being here today, and I don't think we should minimize that at all. So we owe you a debt of thanks for being here.

Rather than making a long speech myself, I particularly want to hear what you have to say about this problem. I know a couple of you didn't quite get to finish your remarks at the beginning, so I'm going to give you an opportunity without asking you a specific question. I'm going to go to Mr. Eshayek first for anything he didn't quite get to do within that time, and I'll make the same available to others.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: First of all, thank you.

One thing I wanted to tell you about is something that happened to me. The other day I went to the McGill encampment to watch it, and when I came back home, I found out there was a video, a full three-minute video about me, and pictures of me and videos of me on Instagram with more than 100,000 views, which had been posted by the pro-Palestinian, pro-Hamas students saying that I'm dangerous, that I'm an ex-IDF soldier and that if you see me on the street to call the police. I'm an international student, so they told people to file complaints against me with the immigration system so it would not renew my study permit or my student visa. My friend Anastasia—she's here too—and I had to hire private security to protect ourselves. I will never forget the moment in November 2023, after the November 8 incident, when I got a phone call from my mother, and she said to come back to Israel because it was safer there than in Canada. That's all I have to say.

Thank you, guys.

● (0930)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Ms. Cook, go ahead.

Ms. Rachel Cook: Thank you for giving me the opportunity.

I just wanted to end my speech with an invitation. If you don't like what you're seeing here, I would love to have you help me. Last year the institution offered to have a menorah lighting in a side room, so let's do that next year. Come and join me to light a menorah. Bring your trees.

[*Translation*]

I believe that French-Canadian and English cultures aren't valued by university administrations. This must change.

[*English*]

I think that the Canadian culture is tired of this, so bring your trees. Let's light some menorahs and let's make campuses safe for Christians, Jews and every other student who doesn't feel safe now.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

Mr. Tarshish.

Mr. Yos Tarshish: Thank you very much.

One question that was asked before was, why is all of this happening? I just want to talk about a few other pieces.

Firstly, Jew hatred is obvious. Anti-Semitism exists in society. We swim in it. It's just systemic; it's always been there. It's 2,000 years old. It's going to take a long time to get rid of it.

That's why we at Hillel talk about pushing anti-Semitism to the margins of campus, not getting rid of it, because it's not reality, and that we have to ground ourselves in the reality that there will always be extremists and always be people with terrible opinions. However, the thing that most concerns me is the rampant misinformation and disinformation spreading among young people, driven basically by young people not engaging with critical thinking.

A great phrase I learned recently refers to “the constellation of beliefs”. If I can pinpoint one star of one of your beliefs, then automatically I can know 20 other beliefs of yours, because you don't think for yourself. You just rely on domino theory dogma: If I believe this, I believe that. I saw a video that came out of an Ameri-

can encampment where a student said, “You should know that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is training Palestinians, and they've always been standing with Palestinians”, the inference being that North Korea are the good guys because they support Palestine and Palestinians are the good guys.

That is what's happening. It's a complete breakdown in critical thinking among our young people. The way I see, really, is that it falls on the people organizing the educational systems: How are you creating this situation where young people don't need to know history? Things of basic history, like really basic things, are shocking to me....

Mr. Randall Garrison: I'm going to give the same opportunity to Ms. Pressman and then Ms. Nashen.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: Anti-Semitism has always been a conspiracy myth. It puts the Jew in the position of what is considered evil in society. Society has changed, and what we consider evil changes. I think it's great that we have more of a cultural awareness of discrimination and of hatred toward all people, but Jews, because of the way anti-Semitism functions, are put as the oppressor, which is what is considered evil in our society.

That's a good thing that we're being aware of discrimination and oppression, but Jews are put in the position where we are seen as helping that. That's why, I think, there's a lot of anti-Semitism in society and how it continues to be that way.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garrison.

We will now go to our second round.

We will start with Madam Lantsman for five minutes.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you.

First of all, thank you for coming. I think there are going to be a lot of people who look up to you from now on, and I hope that you give them the voice and the courage that you've had today to come here.

I appreciate that some people don't want to make this partisan, but I want you to know that there are members of the House of Commons who have been at those encampments, and there are people who have a voice and actually sit at the table who have made it more dangerous to be a Jew in this country. There are some people who speak out of both sides of their mouth that sit in the powers of government and there are some people who do not have a seat at the table who say all of the right things in the right venues—and do not be fooled by them.

Now, I want to know, with just a quick yes or no, do you feel safe on campus, Rachel?

● (0935)

Ms. Rachel Cook: No.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Do you feel safe on campus?

Mr. Michael Eshayek: No.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Do you feel safe on campus?

Ms. Nati Pressmann: No.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Nicole, do you feel safe on campus?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: No.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Do you think the government has done enough to protect Jewish students or to have anybody enforce the law on campus? Answer with just a yes or a no.

Ms. Rachel Cook: No.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: No.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: No.

Ms. Nicole Nashen: No.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: How many Canadian flags do you estimate you have seen at any of these protests on campus?

Ms. Rachel Cook: It's not just at protests: There are very few Canadian flags at all, if not any.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: Zero.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: I've not seen any.

Ms. Nicole Nashen: Zero.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: What an abject failure, first of all, by universities, and an abject failure by the government, frankly, to hold them to account with the money they provide in granting councils, in Canada research chair money and in operational funding at all. What an abject failure by the government to call this out for what it is.

I just want to show you something. This is a member of Parliament who stood with somebody who denies the Holocaust, with somebody who denies October 7, and who stood up with you at a press conference yesterday. These are two ministers in our government that have a voice at the table. Do you think pictures like this help? Yes or no?

Rachel.

Ms. Rachel Cook: No.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: No.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: Last time I checked, I don't have to say yes or no. I don't think that's necessarily relevant to what we're discussing right now. Obviously, the community is harmed by that picture, but I think—

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Thank you.

Ms. Nicole Nashen: I'd like to be asked a question about my experience on campus.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Yes.

Neil, I just want to bring you into this discussion.

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: The problem here is that when people speak out of both sides of their mouth, they give no answers. The reality is that's why I had to go to court to get a neutral arbiter to make a decision to help these people. Every time I look at these poor students, I think to myself what has Canada come to? How is

it that when I open my door in the morning and I look outside, I don't recognize my city. I don't know where I live.

[*Translation*]

I don't recognize my city.

[*English*]

But I will tell you this. Forget about the politics for a moment. Let's talk about what the police are doing. How is there no policy in place for police to enforce existing laws?

Why is it that in 2024 we need a committee to have these students come here so you can hear what's happening?

I will leave you with this. Words have meaning. When people say things that are not right, they impact all of us. I want to point out to this honourable committee that on March 4 words had many meanings, but more importantly bombs, threats, violence and aggression are not Canada.

[*Translation*]

It's not Quebec. It's not Canada.

[*English*]

I stand against hate, but one thing is for certain, Ms. Lantsman. If these young people leave, there will be no committee in the future. This is your future. These are your people.

Please, whatever you do, stop what's going on. McGill is an example of what happens when you do nothing. You cannot sit on a fence, act neutral and eat chocolate and expect things to solve themselves. This isn't partisanship; this is reality.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I want to know if you believe that the government's rhetoric and its policy choices have done anything to protect the Jewish community, or has it put them in danger.

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: I want to be clear for everybody here. I'm no politician; I'm just a simple lawyer. You can think what you want.

When you look at action and you look at reaction, you have your answer. Everything you see here is a result of a void that's been created, and when there's ambiguity, people who hate and people who don't like, they take advantage of this. They take that as a cue to continue with their actions. When you send a bad message, you get a bad reaction.

Who's responsible for that? The government is.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Perfect.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Mendicino, you have five minutes. Go ahead, please.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): I'm going to start by thanking each and every one of the students who has come before this committee. In a time of great anxiety, darkness, fear and anger, you are all a beacon of hope and optimism and courage. You are role models.

I have no doubt that at the end of this exercise, not only will we have emerged as a stronger country but each and every one of you will also have done your families very proud. I want to start by just saying that. You guys are incredible; you're an inspiration.

I am going to read from Concordia University's mission, vision and values website. It says the following:

Concordia values a secure and respectful learning environment and workplace. Concordia is committed to promoting a healthy, safe and sustainable campus and to enhancing the quality of life of the community in which we live.

I'm sure that other schools have similar policies in place.

Ms. Nashen, do you believe that your school is living up to that mission statement?

• (0940)

Ms. Nicole Nashen: No.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Pressmann, do you?

Ms. Nati Pressmann: No.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Eshayek, do you?

Mr. Michael Eshayek: I'm a Concordia student and when I hear that, I don't know if I should laugh or cry.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Cook, do you?

Ms. Rachel Cook: No.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Tarshish, do you?

Mr. Yos Tarshish: No.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As Jewish students, do you believe that in the course of your experience, particularly over the past several months, your right to self-determination has been undermined?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: Yes.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: Yes.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: Absolutely.

Ms. Rachel Cook: It has been not just undermined, but openly mocked.

Mr. Yos Tarshish: I'm not a student, but I work with students and, yes, I see that every single day.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: In the course of your experience and as Jewish students or active members of university campuses, have you heard others claim that the existence of the state of Israel is a racist endeavour?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: At the encampment, I've repeatedly heard the chant, "All Zionists are racists. All Zionists are terrorists."

Ms. Nati Pressmann: Yes.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: Yes.

Ms. Rachel Cook: Absolutely.

Mr. Yos Tarshish: Yes.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: In the course of your experience, have you heard the Jewish people accused of exaggerating the Holocaust?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: Yes.

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: I'm also going to answer that question because it wasn't directed to the students.

The problem that we've seen is that people use social media to put out falsehoods and narratives in order to support and fuel their hatred. The answer is not only yes, but look at the law: The law prohibits it, but nobody is enforcing it, and that's the problem.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: Yes.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: Yes, several times.

Ms. Rachel Cook: Yes—and openly deny.

Mr. Yos Tarshish: Yes.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: In the course of your experience, have you heard people celebrate October 7 and celebrate Hamas?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: Yes.

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: They not only celebrate it but also strategize on how to use it as a tool to continue to oppress not only these students but anybody who loves democracy and freedom. It is happening in our country right now, and it's regrettable.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: Yes.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: Again, "Last night, the resistance in Gaza led a heroic attack against the occupation and has taken over 30 hostages." I don't even need to read it because I remember it. It was on October 8 by SPHR Concordia. SPHR Concordia is still a club, and the students are still students with no consequences.

Ms. Rachel Cook: I will never forget hearing, on October 8, the chant, "There are no civilians".

Mr. Yos Tarshish: It's incredibly concerning. I would also point you to the fact that Jewish students are seeing....

I'm sorry. I had something, and it's gone.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Have you heard that individuals have tried to diminish or suggest that these are isolated incidents? Is that consistent with what you've seen?

In other words, is this pervasive? Is this occurring consistently, daily, in your schools, in your communities?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: In March, at McGill University, someone walked around campus for over four hours with a sign that said, "On October 7, Israel massacred its own people to justify genocide".

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: Social media has been used to continue with this false narrative.

By the way, in our injunctions, a majority of our evidence emanated from their own videos in which they glorify hatred and violence. Then I have to show it to a judge so that the judge understands what's going on.

The answer is yes, yes, and it's unfortunate.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mendicino.

[English]

Now we will go to Mr. Fortin.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: We don't have more time than that? We have another half hour, Madam Chair. We can do a complete round, right?

The Chair: It depends.

• (0945)

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Okay, fine.

I heard your answers to the questions asked by my colleague, Mr. Mendicino. I would like to know one thing.

In your opinion, how should the university respond to this behaviour?

Ms. Nashen, go ahead.

[English]

Ms. Nicole Nashen: They just need to implement their own policies.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: How? What concrete action should the university take?

[English]

Ms. Nicole Nashen: For the past week and a half, I have received an email from McGill University every single day saying that there was an illegal encampment at our university. Having said that, a week and a half later, it's still there.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Oberman, what are your thoughts?

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: We must stop believing that we can solve everyone's problems. We can't remain neutral in a situation of this nature. At McGill University, the issue is quite clear. There are rules. People must follow the rules, but they must want to do so, Mr. Fortin. No willingness means no solution.

I also told the judge that McGill University was asked if it supported the injunction.

Do you know how the university responded? It said that it hadn't asked the court for the injunction.

[English]

So, when you sit on the fence and eat chocolate, don't expect good things to happen.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you. I'm sorry, but I have only one minute left.

Ms. Pressmann, what do you think McGill University should do? How should it approach this deplorable situation?

[English]

Ms. Nati Pressmann: Across the country, we've seen that universities are not properly upholding our rights as students. They need to be using their own policies, but they need to be very clear about how anti-Semitic incidents should be dealt with so that we're not put in the situation where, for months, we're being tossed around to different departments. They also need to be using their own student codes of conduct and to understand that even if hateful speech isn't the same as hate speech, it should still be seen as dangerous to the Jewish student community.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Eshayek, go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Michael Eshayek: I think it's an easy answer. I think the university has to enforce its own policies and bylaws. If a student pushed a police officer on campus, threatened students—

The Chair: You're a bit close to the microphone, I'm told by the interpreters. They can hear you. Just move away from the microphone.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: If a student pushed a police officer on campus, and if the same student threatened the life of other students, physically attacked other students, was arrested twice since the incident and he's still a student at Concordia University, I don't know what to say any more.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Ms. Cook, what are your thoughts?

[English]

Ms. Rachel Cook: Be proactive, not reactive.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: How should we be proactive?

Ms. Rachel Cook: Yes, at the university, instead of students having to make complaints, cultivate an environment where people do not feel empowered to behave with their hateful and divisive views as openly and as freely as they do now.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Fortin.

Mr. Garrison, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to give some time to Ms. Nashen to add anything she wants to in this debate, because I feel that our format sometimes really restricts those who are presenting. I'll start by doing that.

Ms. Nicole Nashen: I want to talk about a protest that took place at McGill University at the end of March, where a crowd of protesters—as they do at all protests—was chanting “Viva, viva, intifada”. I asked a senior administrator at McGill if saying that “We should kill all [insert name of group here] people”, would that violate the McGill code of conduct? They said yes.

I asked why calling for intifada did not violate the McGill code of conduct. They said because calling for the genocide of a group of people explicitly violated the law. Therefore, it violated the code of conduct, but where the law fails to protect us as Jewish students, our universities provide no extra protection.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Ms. Pressman.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: I want to add that I'm here on behalf of the Canadian Union of Jewish Students. CUJS is a non-partisan organization that has multiple students who are involved in different political parties.

At the end of the day when we see a sign calling for an intifada, and at the end of the day when we are excluded from our classes and face violence, every single Jewish student is affected regardless of the fact they're NDP, Liberal, Bloc, Green or Conservative. We are all equally affected by this. In my role here, I want to raise awareness about the fact that we are all dealing with this. I may have my own opinions, and other people may have their own opinions, but I'm here talking on behalf of Jewish students.

Yes, there is a feeling that we could get more support from the government. That is true. Some of us do feel that way, but we're working together to combat this hatred because everyone in this room here cares about anti-Semitism on campus, and I'm here on behalf of Canadian Union of Jewish Students to work with all of you, regardless of any partisanship that may be in this room.

Thank you.

● (0950)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Ms. Cook.

Ms. Rachel Cook: I just want to say that I hope the University of Alberta starts taking a proactive approach and bringing students together. We are a nation of two languages, many cultures and many differences of opinion. In the week after October 7, if the university had been proactive about bringing people together in a good faith attempt to have discussions, this might not have happened, and it wouldn't be to the point where I physically dread walking on-campus every day.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

Mr. Eshayek.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: I just wanted to make one thing clear. What we're doing here today and, since October 7, what my friends and I are doing, is not only for the Jewish community. We're doing it for all the communities. Today, it's about the Jews; tomorrow, it's another minority. We have to solve it now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Van Popta for five minutes, please.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today.

I'm shocked to hear about anti-Semitism. I was raised by Dutch immigrant parents who left the Netherlands after World War II. I was raised hearing stories about Dutch people protecting Jewish people and hiding them, sometimes for years on end, and about the Dutch resistance against the Nazi occupiers. My grandfather died in a Nazi concentration camp for his defence of Jewish people. That's what I was raised on.

I thought anti-Semitism was dead, but obviously I'm naive about these sorts of things. I was very shocked, as was the whole world, about what happened in Israel on October 7.

Now, I have to tell you that I'm also very shocked as to what's going on at campuses in Canada, the Canada that I thought was a free and democratic nation, a country of the rule of law, where the laws should be enforced. I'm shocked to hear these stories.

Thank you for your bravery, for your courage and for standing up for everything that is right and decent.

I do have a question. I think I'll direct it to Nicole.

I thought it was a very interesting analysis equating being Jewish to being Zionist, and anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. You're equating them. Here's my question for you. In an environment of free speech and free expression, is there room for right-thinking people to be critical of the modern State of Israel today and the way it is conducting itself in the Middle East and, in particular, in the war in Gaza right now?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: In August last summer, before October 7, I was in Israel. One of my proudest moments ever to be Jewish was going with my cousins to the protest in Tel Aviv. Jewish people always like to argue. We have lots of different opinions on the actions of the Israeli government. That does not make us any less Zionist or any less proud of our homeland.

Natan Sharansky has three Ds of anti-Semitism: demonization, delegitimization and double standards. You can criticize the actions and the policies of the Israeli government without saying that Jews don't have the right to live there.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

Do you hear that level of discourse in your university today, or is it more of these protests that we're hearing about?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: Two years ago, long before October 7, when I was the president of Hillel at Concordia, I had been sharing a lot about my activism and the activities we were doing at Hillel on campus, and I posted that we were going to be there at a table in the Hall building. This was two years before October 7.

For hours, every 30 minutes, groups of people would come up from behind us and put stickers all over the material we were giving out, which said, “Boycott Israeli Apartheid”. Finally, after about three hours of this happening repeatedly, two individuals came to find me. I'd never seen them before, but I had been stalked on Instagram by accounts like Intifada1999. They came to find me and they asked, “Nikki Nashen, why do you support Israeli apartheid?”, to which I responded, “I've never met you before. How do you know my name?”

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Good. Thank you for that.

I have another question. I'm not sure to whom to direct it, but it's on this concept of equivalency.

We often hear Canadian leaders also mention Islamophobia when they talk about anti-Semitism. I just wonder if that is at all helpful to the conversation about how we manage anti-Semitism.

Maybe I will direct that question to you, Mr. Oberman.

• (0955)

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: I think that's an excellent question. I thank you for posing it.

To make something legitimate, it doesn't have to be posed against something else. Let me give you an example.

The moon and the sun both exist, but not at the same time. One rises, one sets. However, I can tell you that when you try to say that anti-Semitism must be the flip side of something, it delegitimizes it. It says that it cannot exist unto itself; it must have something else to make it legitimate.

I reject it. It's false. It's a narrative. That is exactly what Nicole said.

There is always a way to wrap up your explanations. It's anti-Semitism, but it's not. It's anti-Islamophobia, but it's....

The reality is this, sir. Anti-Semitism can exist by itself. It exists by itself. It has for 5,784 years. There are more people out there who have tried to destroy the Jewish population. They have enslaved the Jews and have murdered the Jews, but here's one thing that's not going to happen, and this is the message for each of you. These people are our future. We will not accept it. We will not tolerate it. If you want to create new laws, start enforcing the existing laws, and maybe we'll get somewhere.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Dabrusin, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Thank you.

I come to this table in, perhaps, a unique situation for the people at this table, because I'm not only a Jewish woman, but I am a Jewish mother of two Jewish students on university campuses in North America right now.

I really thank all of the students for coming here and speaking. I have indirectly, through my children, been living that reality, and it is so important that you've come here.

I want to thank Anthony for having spearheaded this study, because I think it's really important that we take that moment.... I just want to put that out there.

If I seem emotional, it's because I am. This is personal, just as it is for you.

Yesterday, I heard—and I think you mentioned this in some of your speeches—about holding Jewish events, and then being told they can't happen in that way or that you are seeing them disrupted.

Maybe I can start with Nati. I was going to use the example of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

At Queen's were you able to commemorate that day in the same way as you would have in past years?

Ms. Nati Pressmann: No.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: What was the reason you were unable to do so?

Ms. Nati Pressmann: We were told it wasn't safe for us.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Did security from the university or the university administration talk to you about what they could do to make you safe so that you would be able to go ahead as you normally would?

Ms. Nati Pressmann: We took every precaution possible that they told us to take.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: All right.

If I can ask you, Nicole, I don't know if you had the same experience on the McGill campus, but did you see Holocaust Remembrance Day recognized this year in the same way as in past years at McGill?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: No.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: How was it different?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: I don't know of any event that took place.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Okay. I don't mean to put you on the spot, but do you know why it wouldn't be? Has it happened in past years? Do you know why it was different this year?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: It has happened in past years.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Okay. Thank you.

Maybe I can ask the other two, starting with Rachel.

Ms. Rachel Cook: This is my first year at the University of Alberta, so I don't know if Holocaust remembrance occurrences have happened in previous years, but the day that I walked by the art display with the swastika on it was Holocaust Remembrance Day this year.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you.

Michael.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: I cannot answer this specific question, but I can tell you that when we're trying to have events on campus at Concordia, Graham Carr and the administration are telling us that it's not safe for us. The last event we tried to have was the screening of the Nova festival movie, and we were asked to pay \$500 for security guards.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Okay.

On behalf of Hillel Canada, have you seen any universities in Canada that have been getting it right and have been doing the right actions to protect Jewish students on campus?

Mr. Yos Tarshish: Nobody has been doing enough. I'll start by saying that.

I work at Queen's and I have great relationships throughout the university administration. I meet with people regularly. Do I feel like they're doing enough? No, and I tell them that regularly.

I hear from colleagues.... Often, administrators are friendly. They want to help, but they have no idea. We are in a situation where the blind are leading the blind. No one knows what to do, and it shows.

• (1000)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Okay. Thank you.

I don't have much time. I wanted to ask about DEI policies. It's come up a few times. Does it properly include Jewish voices as part of it?

I see that Nicole had her hand up. Maybe I can start with you, Nicole.

Ms. Nicole Nashen: I think it is important that rather than demonizing EDI policies as a package, we need to include Jews in those EDI policies.

My grandfather was born in Yemen. My grandmother was born in Morocco. I am not white, and the Jews who might appear white here are not white either, because when the Holocaust happened and all of them had the same colour of skin as everyone else in eastern Europe, they were still gassed and burned because they were not considered white enough for that society.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I have under 30 seconds. I'm going to ask people to put in written submissions, if you can, about how to better include Jewish voices in DEI policies, but if I can, I'll ask you quickly, Nati, because you had your hand up—I don't know if you might be able to speak to it—about also including safe spaces intersectionally when we're looking at DEI policies and if you might have something to add on that.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: I'm a queer Jew. My funding at my university goes to an initiative for queer people to feel safe. That same club posts images supporting October 7. I don't feel safe in queer spaces, and I should be feeling safe in those spaces. Our funding—my funding, my student funds—should go to those spaces to make sure I feel safe in them, because I can't take away one part of my identity. It's all my identity. I'm this one person, and I can't check it at the door, because it's who I am.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Looking at the time, I can go to three minutes each for each of the four parties. I need about three minutes for committee business as well.

I'm going to ask Ms. Gladu to start.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Very good.

The federal government has a responsibility to put the Criminal Code in place to set the law and to ensure it's enforced. In the Criminal Code, it's an offence to advocate or promote genocide; to publicly incite hatred in a way that's "likely to lead to a breach of the peace"; to "wilfully promote..hatred against [an] identifiable group"; to "wilfully promote...antisemitism"; or to commit mischief related to certain forms of property that's "motivated by bias, prejudice or hate".

Yet, all of these things are happening across the country. We have heard from your testimony about the things that are happening on campus. We could add to that the blocking at Avenue Road of critical infrastructure, which is also illegal. We could add the blocking of the road in front of Mount Sinai Hospital, which was also illegal.

In all of these cases, we do not see universities enforcing their code of conduct, we do not see the police arresting people for committing what are crimes and, also, the federal government has not taken an action to ensure the rule of law is enforced.

Do you agree with my assessment?

I'll start with Rachel.

Ms. Rachel Cook: I'm a big fan of equality, I guess, as the university would put it. If it is a secular and apolitical space where there cannot be Christmas trees and there cannot be menorahs, then there should be no minority flags of any type. It should be a strictly secular space.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Michael.

Mr. Michael Eshayek: Yes, I agree with you.

Graham Carr, the president of the university, has set up a task force to address systemic discrimination, identity-based violence and hate on campus and beyond. On the surface, this is a positive initiative, but one of the three co-chairs appointed is a supporter of BDS. She's against the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, and she's an anti-Zionist. I think that says everything.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Okay.

Nati.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: I think all laws should be enforced to protect Jewish people. I also think we need to be speaking to our universities to ensure that they're upholding their own codes of conduct.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Oberman.

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: The rule of law doesn't apply only to Jews. It applies to all citizens of Canada. When you don't follow the rule of law, you create a vacuum for the haters. My recommendation is that before you create new laws, enforce the laws that are there and educate the police and the people who enforce those laws.

As an example, on March 5, when I had an injunction, the first thing the police said to me was, "I don't understand. What do you want?"

• (1005)

It's education, education, education. Remember what I said. Ignorance is not bliss, and education is the solution.

More laws create more ambiguity before you enforce the current laws.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: All right. What would you suggest the federal government do to ensure that the enforcement of the rule of law is applied equally to all Canadians?

I'll start with Mr. Tarshish.

The Chair: Ms. Gladu, that's it.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: That was it. Okay.

You can submit your answers then.

The Chair: Yes.

We'll go to Mr. Housefather, please.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: The Parliament of Canada makes the Criminal Code. Enforcement is provincial, not federal.

Today, a lot of things have been blamed on the federal government, when post-secondary institutions are the jurisdiction of the provinces, and college administrators are largely responsible for what happens. Despite that, there seems to be an attempt by one party to pretend that the federal government is responsible for everything.

Again, I want to come back to your experiences on campus. One of the things I've heard a lot from many sources is that these demonstrations are not at all anti-Semitic, and it's a tiny group of people at these demonstrations who are anti-Semitic. I think you've all said you don't agree with that.

We're going to have the opportunity to call university presidents to this committee, if we would like to do that, and I think we should. What universities' presidents should we call?

Ms. Pressmann, you have a national organization. Could you give us some examples of whom we should call?

Ms. Nati Pressmann: I would say all of them, but to be realistic, OCAD University in Toronto is one to talk to, as well as TMU. I would also include Emily Carr University in B.C.

Those are my top three, I would say.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Tarshish, do you have a national organization?

Mr. Yos Tarshish: I have a national organization, but I don't necessarily know whether.... I've been in Canada for six years. I know

the university presidents on my campus. I don't know whether I'm....

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I understand.

Ms. Cook, should we call the president of the University of Alberta?

Ms. Rachel Cook: Absolutely.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Eshayek, should we call the president of Concordia?

Mr. Michael Eshayek: Yes. Graham Carr should be the first one here.

We can look back at Concordia University. In 2002, there was the Bibi Netanyahu riot. We can see there was BDS in 2014. In 2021, Nikki was attacked, as well as in 2023 and now.

Therefore, Graham Carr should be here.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Ms. Nashen, should we call Deep Saini at McGill?

Ms. Nicole Nashen: Yes. I've received emails from the McGill administration for the past seven months with empty words, and I'd like to know why those words are empty and why they're not implemented with action.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Oberman, you've dealt with both Concordia and McGill. Should we call both of those presidents?

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: Not only should you call them, but if they don't come, you should subpoena them, because they are the people who are causing the problems. Listen to what this poor student has to say.

Anthony, you are correct, but the funding of justice is a key issue today in Canada. When the judges don't have enough ability to sit in court because there aren't enough staff, there are issues.

However, I will tell you this. I understand that you want to talk about what you want. I understand—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I understand. I have other questions and I have very limited time.

I understand that funding is an issue—

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: Call anybody who can come and help us solve the problem, with no distinctions made. Concordia is a top offender, period.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I understand.

Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I'm going to end by thanking all of you because, again, there are some times when things may not exactly be only in our jurisdiction.

However, I think having the national media cover those voices and having Canadians—all those Canadians of good faith—understanding your stories and understanding what's happening on campuses is going to cause many more Canadians to rally around this cause and push university administrators and all levels of government to do better.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Neil G. Oberman: You should also not forget about CEGEPs, because there are CEGEPs that are suffering as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for three minutes. Mr. Garrison will then also have the floor for three minutes.

[*English*]

We will then conclude.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll try to cover all the bases in three minutes.

I gather from Ms. Cook's comments that universities should maintain an environment that doesn't allow this type of abuse. I agree. Mr. Oberman says that the police should step in and that the authorities should enforce the law. I agree with him too. Mr. Eshayek tells us that the current fight for the Jewish community isn't just for the Jewish community, but for all minority communities. I also agree with this.

The violence everywhere, especially on campuses, is a social issue. As I said earlier, I think that university campuses are wonderful places. They should be the most welcoming places in the world, where people are allowed to debate everything vigorously and authoritatively, but always respectfully.

I totally agree with what you said. This situation is unacceptable.

Ms. Cook, you said that it's important to maintain an environment that doesn't allow this type of abuse. In your opinion, are any other communities currently victims of this type of oppression, or is it just the Jewish community, to your knowledge?

• (1010)

Ms. Rachel Cook: Yes. There are Christian communities and other communities

[*English*]

They are not supported by the sort of politically popular mood of the day on campus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Are you aware of any situations involving other minority communities being ostracized or experiencing this type of abuse?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Eshayek: The example I gave was November 8. We have November 23, December 13, and March 4. I don't even need to look at the paper, because I remember these dates.

I want to tell you something. The first time I came to Montreal, Canada, I was 13. It was my dream to move here. When I finished my military service, I moved here. I never imagined that moving to Montreal would be the worst thing that would ever happen to me, because of the anti-Semitism, and because of what I have to go through right now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Eshayek. You're more than welcome in Quebec. I hope that you'll stay with us for a long time.

I'm running out of time. My final point is that, in my opinion, we need to work on this area. I support Quebec's state secularism law, because I don't think that the authorities should get involved in religious debates. People should be able to practise the religion of their choice and debate it respectfully.

Thank you all for being here.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

For the final three minutes, we have Mr. Garrison, please.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you, Madam Chair. As I always point out, one advantage of being the fourth party is that you often get the last questions.

One thing I have heard a lot about and that we haven't really focused on here today is the attempt to exclude Jewish student organizations and defund them. I'm going to start with Mr. Tarshish, and ask him to talk about that experience, because I'm very concerned about it.

Mr. Yos Tarshish: This is a regular thing. The attempt to ban Jewish student organizations on campuses is not a new thing. Everyone wants us to think this is a new thing.

I come from the U.K. originally. There were attempts to ban Jewish societies on campus in the U.K. from as early as 1973, especially after the UN passed its infamous "Zionism is racism" resolution in 1975. That became a really serious thing that Jewish students had to deal with in the U.K. for 25 years.

We've come out the other side of it. Coming here, it is shocking. There is a lot more that can be done right now. Seeing my organization, Hillel, called a Zionist cultural institution, and therefore not allowed on campus, is just laughable to me.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Nicole.

Ms. Nicole Nashen: At campus protests, there are often calls from the BDS movement, which effectively does not do anything to change the lives of Palestinian people. Maybe it will remove Sabra hummus from the cafeterias.

Other than that, it labels Jewish organizations who, other than the anti-Zionist Jewish organizations, which represents a fringe minority of our community.... We all have ties to Israel. Hillel facilitates birthrights and internships in Israel. Our mainstream organizations that facilitate Shabbat dinners and social events are deemed complicit and, therefore, attempts are made to remove funding from our organizations.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Nati, go ahead.

Ms. Nati Pressmann: For many Jews, Zionism is completely linked to our Jewish identity, to Judaism. Some of us see attempts to ban these institutions because they're Zionist as attempts to ban themselves because they're Jewish.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

Rachel, go ahead.

Ms. Rachel Cook: Jewish students are the only students on campus who have to qualify their cultural heritage before they are allowed in public spaces or to be taken seriously.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

I know we have just 30 seconds left, as I can read. I just want to thank you again for the courage and forthrightness you've brought to this table today. I promise you that I, and I know other members

of the committee, will work hard to make sure that your voices are reflected in the work we do.

Thank you.

• (1015)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your testimony. Thank you for your courage and for appearing today.

Please know that the committee—the chair and members—are here because we want to be here. It is a study that we all want to listen to, and we are here to do what we as parliamentarians can do in the time we have here, so thank you very much for coming.

For the members, I have two points. The clerk will send emails to you as you return to your offices. Please look at them. One is from the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The clerk requires a response on that—yes or no—from you members by Friday, please.

The second email he will send is from the Liaison Committee. That one we have a little bit more time on, so just take a look at that email.

Thank you very much, and have a lovely day, everybody.

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