Letter to University Presidents

February 22, 2010

I am writing to you today to express my sincere concern over the upcoming Israel Apartheid Week (IAW) activities at university campuses across Canada, which seem to have triggered an increased feeling of antisemitism on university campus life across Canada. Jewish students have already been targeted at York University, where they were not only verbally but physically threatened; attempts to counter anti-Israel and anti-Jewish propaganda have been met with intimidation and physical confrontation, and are likely to do so again when Jewish students attempt to assert their rights to express an opinion in a peaceful manner.

Sadly, our community is now under siege by increasingly radicalized students intent on fomenting hate, rather than contributing to measured discourse. I am concerned not only for the safety of Jewish students, but for their right to feel secure in an academic environment- a right that on campuses like York University has already been compromised.

In light of the ongoing efforts by participants in IAW to marginalize the Jewish population of Canadian universities, our position is that IAW should not be permitted on university campuses- not only because they misrepresent Israel as an apartheid state, but because they also present a clear security threat to other students, encourage antisemitism which spills into the wider community, and, most significantly from an academic viewpoint, use the university to gain legitimacy and credibility for radicalized hatred.

We are well aware of the absolute need of universities to protect the rights of all students to engage in free speech- no matter how damaging and disturbing that speech may be. If you are to proceed and allow IAW to carry on, we encourage you not to become complicit in the week of antisemitic propaganda by permitting IAW to hijack your campus. We will be monitoring campuses across the country and intend to hold university administrations responsible for any harm to students arising from IAW.

I suggest security be increased and that only private lecture halls be used for IAW events, rather than public spaces, and that you ensure proper procedures are in place and followed for all IAW activities. The academic freedom of Canadian universities rests upon providing for the safety and security of ALL students, not only for those who shout the loudest.

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,

Avi Benlolo
President & CEO
Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies