

Letter to the Editor of the Toronto Star
April 8, 2010

Re: Controversial Mideast book stays in Toronto schools (April 7, 2010)

The contentious issue of banning books is one that can never be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. We live in a democratic society which holds free speech as one of our highest ideals – even for those too young to always understand the context of that speech. It is for this reason that we have not called for the censorship of the very one-sided “The Shepherd's Granddaughter”, but have instead issued a caution to teachers to be aware that there is indeed a great deal of context to the issues depicted in this book. We remain concerned that the wider story – including such tidbits as the recent naming of a public school and a public square in the West Bank after a notorious terrorist who murdered dozens of people – will not be included in discussions about the issues raised by the book. We fear that Jewish and Israelis children in public schools will now be subjected to the same sort of intimidation and threats experienced by their older brothers and sisters in many Canadian Universities during Israeli Apartheid Week. We monitor the news and note that Jews remain the most targeted group for hate crimes in Canada. Books like these do not help destroy antisemitism, but inflame it. Teachers need to be aware of these facts.

I wonder whether a similar book about a traumatized Jewish child living in Sderot, Israel, forced daily into bomb shelters as a result of Palestinian terrorism, would be as widely accepted in our schools.

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