

Toronto Restricts Academic Freedom: 'Israeli Apartheid Week' Not Permitted to Take Place

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

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Toronto – Last week, Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Director of Education Chris Spence announced in a statement that “‘Israeli Apartheid Week’ and its activities are not permitted to take place on school or Board property, or as part of any activity under the jurisdiction of the TDSB.” Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) considers this announcement a clear attempt to discourage rational discussion of the constellation of issues addressed by Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW), and therefore considers it an unacceptable restriction on the academic freedom that should be enjoyed by the TDSB’s community.

Spence’s announcement came on the heels of a motion on IAW introduced by Thornhill MPP Peter Shurman which condemned the use of the term Israeli Apartheid Week; that motion was passed by 30 members of the Ontario Legislature on February 25. Shurman’s motion had no legal weight, and stopped short of actually urging that IAW activities themselves be prohibited. Spence’s statement, however, went further by prohibiting IAW activities at TDSB schools. It thereby limits the discussion of Middle East issues – of vital interest to TDSB students and their families and meriting informed and open debate – within public education institutions.

“This is a disturbing precedent on several counts,” notes CJPME President Thomas Woodley. “First, however, singling out IAW activities and prohibiting them at TDSB schools or properties restricts freedom of expression, thereby violating Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” CJPME believes that limiting discussion on Israeli institutions of apartheid – institutions well-documented by human rights organizations and internationally respected figures – will only exacerbate the sense of frustration felt by many Torontonians who disagree with many actions of the Israeli government and its institutions. Spence’s decision appears to have been reached without public consultation or even a full and open debate by TDSB trustees. “The TDSB trustees need to insist that the right to freedom of expression be respected in TDSB schools,” continued Woodley. “Singling out IAW activities and censoring them is counterproductive with respect to both the intents and principles of our educational institutions,” concluded Woodley.

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is one of many organizations which have catalogued some of the numerous manifestations of Apartheid in Israel. These include racially-based family reunification laws, racially-based municipal development practices, racially-based approval of building permits, non-recognition of Palestinian villages, racially-based inequalities for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and discriminatory policing of

Palestinian citizens of Israel. Many Israeli human rights organizations are at the forefront in terms of documenting such practices, and scores of these practices have been highlighted in highly public reports, including the Israeli Or Commission of 2003.

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is a non-profit and secular organization bringing together men and women of all backgrounds who labour to see justice and peace take root again in the Middle East. Its mission is to empower decision-makers to view all sides with fairness and to promote the equitable and sustainable development of the region.

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