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February 12, 2024

President Rhonda Lenton
Office of the President
York University
Toronto Ontario

Subject: Urgent Appeal for Safeguarding Academic Freedom and Free Speech Rights on York University Campus

Dear President Lenton:

I am writing on behalf of the Mount Royal Faculty Association representing over 800 full-time and contract academic faculty to express our deep concern regarding the violation of the academic freedom of one of our members - Dr. Muhannad Ayyash – on February 2, 2024. Our understanding is that Dr. Ayyash's invited lecture, "The Palestinian Struggle for Liberation: Aspirations for a Decolonial Life," was deliberately interrupted by Toronto Police Services officers, acting on behalf of York University, on the premise that this academic gathering of less than 30 people constituted a major security event.

Summoning police to a lecture of a professor of any institution is an unwarranted intrusion into academic freedom and we are concerned that this incident is an example of calling the police on someone in an attempt to intimidate and exercise power over them. This is a well-known technique of silencing and control, used especially against racialized individuals. The use of the Toronto Police Service here appears to be intent on silencing of Palestinian scholars' voices and is a clear infringement on Dr. Ayyash's academic freedom to present his perspectives on conflicts in Palestine/Israel.

All academics have the right to academic freedom, especially during times of conflict. The MRFA serves as a champion for the academic freedom of our faculty at home and away, and our work is founded on the belief that academics must be able to present their work without fear of intimidation or being silenced. As President of the MRFA, I write to insist

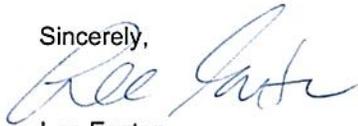
1. An immediate public apology be issued, on behalf of York University, yourself and Provost Phillips, to Dr. Ayyash.
2. York University launch an urgent public investigation into who contacted the Toronto Police Service regarding the February 2, 2024 lecture - an investigation which should also address the allegations made by the group or individuals who initiated the complaint.
3. York University publicly affirm its support for academic freedom on its campuses.

One of the cornerstones of any reputable academic institution is the preservation and promotion of academic freedom. It is the bedrock upon which intellectual inquiry thrives, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives and ideas can be explored and debated without fear of reprisal. The MRFA believes that a commitment to academic freedom is not only essential for the advancement of knowledge but is also integral to the development of critical thinking skills among our students.

We hope that by addressing these concerns promptly and proactively, York University can demonstrate its commitment to fostering a vibrant intellectual community where faculty members feel secure in expressing their research insights and their knowledge.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Lee Easton
MRFA President

cc. Provost Lisa Philipps, York University
Professor Muhannad Ayyash
David Robinson, Executive Director, Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)
Don O'Donnell, Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA)
Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)
Dr. Tim Rahlly, President and Vice-Chancellor, Mount Royal University
Dr. Chad London, Provost and Vice President, Academic, Mount Royal University
MRFA Executive Board