



York University Graduate Students' Association (Local 84) and York Federation of Students (Local 68)

Official Statement on November 20th, 2019

November 24, 2019

On Wednesday November 20th, an event titled "Reservists on Duty: Hear from former Israeli Defence Force (IDF) soldiers" was hosted at York University. The announcement of the event was faced with contention seeing as the Israeli Defence Forces have been responsible for, and charged with, several human rights violations against Palestinians. In a 2017 [United Nations special report](#) on the Israeli treatment of Palestinians, Israel was found guilty of imposing an apartheid regime on the Palestinian people as defined by international law.

A large number of York University students, community members, and student clubs organized a lawful, non-violent counter demonstration. The peaceful protesters were met with hostile event attendees who were verbally and physically abusive to a number of students. The Jewish Defense League (JDL), [a far-right group widely considered a terrorist organization](#), was present with the intention of confronting pro-Palestinian supporters. Muslim students attending the protest were harassed by a number of JDL members who attempted to forcefully remove their scarves. [One event attendee stole a Palestinian flag](#) and later returned it to security after urinating on it.

A York graduate student and teaching assistant, was assaulted and suffered a concussion after being punched in the back of the head. As he was being rushed out of Vari Hall and into an ambulance, a group of young men filmed him while laughing and [mocking the injured student](#).

Despite an increased presence of both York Security and Toronto Police Services, there was a lack of intervention by them to fully protect the students, staff, and community members who were actively being threatened, harassed, and attacked. We are incredibly outraged by the lack of response by the university, along with their failure to

protect the students, staff, and community members that were present. We are disappointed by the lack of accountability on the part of York University administration. York's senior administration and campus security were [aware of this event](#) and the potential violence faced by their students - and yet, remained complicit.

[The response sent by President Rhonda Lenton](#) is not only vague but fails to recognize the violence wrought on our students by members of the JDL. There is overwhelming evidence of aggression and violence by JDL members inflicted that evening. Many of our members have video recordings and photos of JDL members shouting hateful racist and Islamophobic slurs at York University students.

It is deeply concerning that York's senior administrators allowed this event to take place, and failed to take the appropriate steps to maintain the safety of all students present at the event. The Statement of Policy on Free Speech states, "the University will not tolerate members of our community or guests engaging in **threatening speech or actions** which violates York's commitments to ensure the safety of community members, as noted in various policies". As an institution that prides themselves in equity and inclusivity, being a bystander to threatening speech and violence is a shameful breach of those values.

We the students demand that the university take immediate action to ensure that known members of the JDL, and other organizations that are complicit in violent and harmful behaviour, are no longer allowed on our campus.

If you are in need of support after this event, please feel free to visit the YFS Wellness Centre in Rm. 346 of the Second Student Centre.