



End the Repression in Canada's Health Sector

Protect the Right to Free Expression in Support of Palestinian Rights

May 4, 2025

Since October 2023, Israel has implemented [“a concerted policy to destroy the health-care system of Gaza.”](#) Israel has [targeted](#) nearly every hospital in Gaza as part of its genocidal war; as of [April 30, 2025](#), [only 22](#) of Gaza's 35 hospitals remain partially functional, while 60% of primary health centres have been destroyed. To date, Israel's military has [killed 1,200 Palestinian healthcare workers](#) and [408 aid workers](#), and it has abducted and [tortured](#) hundreds of healthcare workers, many of them specifically because they are healthcare workers. Israeli physicians are [accused](#) of participating in this torture. The toll of this genocide has reached horrific proportions: as of April 30, 2025, [52,400 Palestinians have been killed and 119,014 injured](#) by Israel, and “it is not [implausible to estimate](#) that up to 186 000 or even more deaths could be attributable to the current conflict in Gaza.” Amidst unimaginable conditions, Gazan medical and public health personnel have worked steadfastly to preserve and honour life.

In opposition to these genocidal crimes and in solidarity with our courageous healthcare colleagues, scores of health workers of conscience across Canada and [around the world](#) have spoken out, supported protest efforts including the [Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions](#) (BDS) movement, and contributed directly to humanitarian relief missions in Gaza and Lebanon. Alarming, many of these health workers and learners have experienced a relentless, multi-pronged campaign of harassment, intimidation, and silencing, which treats Palestinians and speech in support of Palestinian rights as inherently antisemitic or sympathetic to terrorism. Simultaneously, there has been an inexcusable lack of accountability within Canadian health institutions for [individuals](#) whose [support](#) for the State of Israel has taken the form of harassment and threats. This is [anti-Palestinian Racism](#) (APR), and it has been leveled especially against Palestinian, Muslim, and Arab health workers, along with other racialized people and gender minorities. Despite widespread APR, these health workers and learners have continued to stand firm in support of justice.

Targeting of Palestinian Rights Defenders Is Not New

We have arrived at what the BC Civil Liberties Association [calls](#) “a watershed moment of peril for civil liberties in Canada.” But the targeting of Palestinian rights defenders is not new. As documented in the 2022 Independent Jewish Voices [report](#), *Unveiling the Chilly Climate: The Suppression of Speech on Palestine in Canada*, there has long been widespread APR in academia, including political interference in hiring practices, cancelation of events, harassment (including threatened and actual violence), and doxxing of Palestinian rights advocates. In 2021, for example, the International Human Rights Program at the University of Toronto rescinded a job offer to renowned legal scholar Valentina Azarova following [donor interference](#) which cited her record of work on Palestinian rights. Notably, the donor was a board member of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA). This example of APR was an [international scandal](#) and led to the [censure](#) of the university by the Canadian Association of University Teachers. Also in 2021, Dr. Ritika Goel, who at the time was the Faculty Lead in Social Accountability with the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto, faced [accusations of](#)

[antisemitism](#) and calls for her dismissal after she posted to her personal social media account in support of Palestinians. The campaign against Dr. Goel was [promoted](#) by the lobby group Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center.

These forms of [repression and targeting](#) have only escalated alongside the escalating genocide, starvation, and destruction of health infrastructure in Gaza. This is occurring despite advocacy in support of Palestinian rights being in line with stated institutional goals of health equity and justice, and the growing body of evidence detailing Israel's violations of Palestinian rights. The International Criminal Court has issued [arrest warrants](#) for top Israeli officials. The International Court of Justice has issued an [Advisory Opinion](#) finding that Israel's policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory amount to apartheid. And the world's leading human rights organizations have concluded that [Israel is committing genocide](#) against Palestinians in Gaza, including by using [starvation](#) and the [deprivation of water](#) as weapons of extermination.

Institutionalizing APR in Healthcare

Because of its status, healthcare represents an important platform from which pro-Israel advocacy groups in Canada attempt to legitimize the policies and actions of the State of Israel, and to smear and silence its critics. There are presently efforts within the health sector to institutionalize suppression of speech that is critical of the State of Israel. The most prominent example of these efforts comes from the Canadian Federation of Jewish Medical Associations (CFJMA), an umbrella organization comprised of the Jewish Medical Association of Ontario (JMAO), the Jewish Medical Association of British Columbia (JMABC), the Jewish Physicians Association of Manitoba, L'Association des Médecins Juifs du Québec (AMJQ), and similar groups that claim to represent the interests of Jewish physicians and medical learners. In reality, these groups have a political mission: building solidarity with Israel. The JMAO, for example, [welcomes](#) only Zionist Jewish members. In its [submission](#) to Canada's Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in June 2024, the CFJMA calls for universities and their affiliated medical schools to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism as a "regulatory tool." The IHRA definition has been [widely discredited](#) and [rejected](#), including by the Canadian Association of University Teachers and numerous Jewish organizations. The IHRA definition conflates criticism of the State of Israel with antisemitism, which weaponizes antisemitism to suppress speech on Palestine.

Examples of APR in Healthcare

Herein we present four cases – among countless others – of healthcare workers in Canada who have been targeted for speaking out for Palestinian rights and against the destruction of healthcare infrastructure in Gaza, including the targeted [killing, disappearance, sexual abuse, rape, and torture](#) of colleagues. These public cases illustrate a range of techniques used to target hundreds of health professionals and learners, including harassment, doxing, censorship, baseless suspension, and, most consistently, the [weaponization](#) of a politicized definition of antisemitism. Like many others, these individuals have refused to be silenced, and they continue to speak truth to power.

Case 1 - Dr. Ben Thomson (suspension, weaponization of antisemitism, doxing, threats)

In October 2023, Dr. Thomson, a nephrologist at Mackenzie Richmond Hill Hospital who has done humanitarian medical work in Gaza, was [suspended](#) without pay following social media posts expressing support for Palestine. Some of Dr. Thomson's posts warned against misinformation leading to the dehumanization of Palestinians and the justification of Israel's genocide. Dr. Thomson was smeared as antisemitic, and his home address was shared online. He received numerous death threats, which forced him to leave home under the advice of police, and his workplace received bomb threats. Given the lack of any grounds for suspension, Dr. Thomson was ultimately [reinstated](#).

Case 2 - Dr. Mathew Hannouche (racism, weaponization of antisemitism, complaints against learners)

Dr. Hannouche, a critical care physician in Montreal, signed a [letter](#) published by Health workers Alliance for Palestine on November 10, 2023, titled "Urgent Statement Against the Israeli Destruction of the Health System in Gaza." The letter garnered more than 3700 signatures from health workers across Canada. Dr. Hannouche did not promote the letter or that he had signed it. Nevertheless, on November 13, 2023, he began receiving racist and defamatory emails from numerous colleagues, accusing him of antisemitism. Hospital leaders and physician colleagues were copied on these emails. In his [written brief](#) for the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in June 2024, Dr. Hannouche notes that he subsequently became aware that at least ten medical learners at McGill suffered "attacks, complaints or accusations of baseless antisemitism related to their advocacy for Palestinian human rights", adding, "[t]he learner in every case was Arab, and the majority were visibly Muslim women".

Case 3 - Dr. Leslie Solomonian (censorship, weaponization of antisemitism, workplace complaints)

Dr. Solomonian is a naturopathic doctor and professor at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine. In January 2024, she responded to an Instagram post by the College marking the International Day of Holocaust Remembrance, which called for upholding human rights for all. Dr. Solomonian expressed agreement with this sentiment and drew attention to the unfolding genocide in Gaza. Later the same day, without consultation, her comment was removed. She subsequently [received](#) a slew of messages charging her with antisemitism. Her manager submitted a formal complaint against her for her comment and for other social media activity in support of Palestinian liberation, suggesting that she was denying the Nazi holocaust by comparing it to the "conflict" in Palestine. The complaint was investigated and closed. Notably, Dr. Solomonian's union, CUPE, has adopted a BDS mandate and has [opposed IHRA](#).

Case 4 - Dr. Gem Newman (censorship, weaponization of antisemitism, donor interference)

In May 2024, Dr. Newman delivered the valedictory address to the graduating class of the Max Rady College of Medicine at the University of Manitoba. In his [remarks](#), Dr. Newman encouraged his classmates to oppose settler colonialism both at home and abroad and to demand a ceasefire in Gaza, including an end to Israel's deliberate targeting of medical infrastructure. The ceremony was live streamed on YouTube and the university's website. However, the recording was removed after donor Ernest Rady wrote a letter to the university's president and its Faculty of Health Sciences dean, demanding that the valedictory remarks be cut. [Rady's letter](#) accused Dr. Newman of "hate speech" as well as "disrespect[ing] and disparag[ing] Jewish people as a whole, including Jewish students." The Faculty of Health Sciences dean condemned the address, while the University of Manitoba Faculty

Association president supported Dr. Newman's freedom of expression. Since beginning his residency, Dr. Newman has faced [more than 20 complaints](#), many demanding that he not be permitted to practice medicine. In April 2025, all complaints filed against Dr. Newman were resolved informally, with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba finding no evidence of wrongdoing.

Across all of the cases above, we are not aware of any individual or institution having been held accountable for the vexatious accusations of antisemitism, the resultant impacts on professional reputation and livelihood, or the personal and legal financial costs. The refusal of Canada's [shamefully silent](#) health institutions to hold perpetrators of APR accountable emboldens attackers and signals implicit institutional endorsement of both the form and content of the attacks.

Health Institutions Must Uphold Their Declared Commitments to Justice, Equity, and Human Rights

While Gaza's health system is systematically destroyed by Israel, health workers in Canada who protest the bombing of hospitals and the killing of colleagues in Gaza face silencing, harassment, bullying, and the risk of dismissal from our workplaces. As we expose this repression and its harms, we proudly reaffirm our principled stance in support of Palestinian rights and unequivocally declare that this repression will only motivate us to speak louder. We will not be silenced.

Upholding institutional mandates for health equity and justice demands that the targeting of those who speak out for Palestinian rights must end. Terms that describe Palestinian life under occupation and the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, such as "[apartheid](#)", "[settler colonialism](#)", "[ethnic cleansing](#)", "[genocide](#)", and "[From the River to the Sea](#)" must not be censored. Discussion around and support for the BDS movement must be permitted, and [critiques](#) of the political ideology of Zionism, including [claims](#) that it is a racist ideology, must not result in censure.

We therefore expect:

1. That our rights to free speech and academic freedom are protected, especially as they relate to advocacy for Palestinian rights, including the right to self determination.
2. That health faculties and institutions reject the IHRA definition of antisemitism.
3. That health faculties and institutions hold accountable members who commit – or have committed – acts of anti-Palestinian racism.
4. An end to interference by pro-Israel lobby groups in institutional decision making.

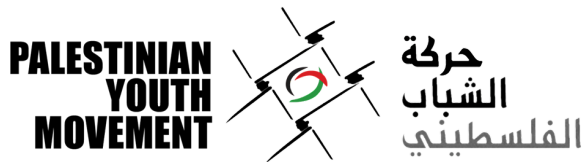
Endorsements

OCHU / CUPE

ONTARIO COUNCIL OF HOSPITAL UNIONS / CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES



Palestinian Feminist Collective



Canadians in Support of Refugees in Dire Need



BC Nurses United for Social Justice

