



## VICTORIA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

150 Charles St. West, Room 127  
Toronto, ON , M5S 1K9  
(416) 585 - 4473  
[www.vusac.ca](http://www.vusac.ca) | [fb.com/vusacuoft](https://fb.com/vusacuoft)

**May 26, 2021**

### **Re: Palestine and UofT**

We, the executive of the Victoria University Students' Administrative Council, express our solidarity with Palestinians who have been subject to ethnic cleansing and military violence being carried out by Israeli military forces. Israel has engaged in apartheid, illegal occupation, and have violated human rights.<sup>1</sup> In the simplest and strongest terms, free Palestine.

A human rights academic, Dr. Valentina Azarova, was denied the position of Director of the International Human Rights Program (IHRP) at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Law due to her academic work and advocacy on Israel's occupation of Palestine after a major donor to UofT Law objected to her hiring.<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International has also paused their Digital Verification Corps partnership with the law school and its IHRP.<sup>3</sup>

The rescinded appointment of Dr. Azarova endangers the principle of academic freedom and expression and sets a dangerous precedent for future hiring. This follows concerning trends of Palestinian solidarity being silenced.<sup>4</sup> Israel has long benefitted from the support of Western settler-colonial nations like the US and Canada while occupying Palestinian land. It is crucial we stop supporting the continued violence against Palestinians. Rather, the University of Toronto and Victoria University must amplify Palestinian solidarity. We, the executives of VUSAC, firmly believe that students, faculty, and staff should feel comfortable advocating against violence, including the ongoing acts of violence against Palestinians.

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<sup>1</sup> "Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution | HRW." 27 Apr. 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>. Accessed 25 May 2021.

<sup>2</sup> "University of Toronto's Leadership Draws Fire Over Academic ...." 28 Apr. 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/28/university-torontos-leadership-draws-fire-over-academic-freedom>. Accessed 25 May 2021.

<sup>3</sup> "Amnesty International suspends relationship with U of T over ...." 19 May 2021, <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/amnesty-international-suspends-relationship-with-u-of-t-over-decision-to-rescind-job-offer-to-human-rights-scholar-1.5434714>. Accessed 25 May 2021.

<sup>4</sup> "Ousted AP Journalist Says She Was 'Hung Out to Dry' By the News Agency." 23 May 2021, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2021/05/emily-wilder-ap-journalist-fired>. Accessed 26 May 2021.



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We also recognize that Victoria University, the University of Toronto, and Canada as a whole are rooted in colonialism and the violation of Indigenous people, their rights and their land. As larger institutions, to support Palestinians internationally means to actively engage in decolonization at home. We urge everyone to reflect upon how their actions fuel the ongoing cycle of violence against Indigenous communities.

We echo the demands of the Arts and Science Students' Union<sup>5</sup> and the Muslim Students' Association<sup>6</sup> in urging the university administration to:

1. Issue a statement of support for Palestinian students and their allies to be able to safely engage in Palestinian discourse on campus
2. Discontinue research trips and exchange programs to Israel
3. Acknowledge that the IHRP hiring decision was an example of censorship of Palestinian activism, restore Dr. Azarova's offer of a position, and re-examine the hiring decisions of the university moving forward

In service and solidarity,

**The Victoria University Students' Administrative Council Executive**

**Jerico Raguindin**, President

**Sooyeon Lee**, Vice-President External

**Nerija Gray**, Vice-President Internal

**Kate Haberl**, Vice-President Student Organizations

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<sup>5</sup>“Statement on Academic Freedom and Palestine.” 18 May 2021, <https://assu.ca/wp/2021/05/18/statement-on-academic-freedom-and-palestine/>. Accessed 26 May 2021.

<sup>6</sup>“RE: Ethnic Cleansing in Palestine.” 17 May 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/uoftmsa/posts/10159173965608058>. Accessed 26 May 2021.