

To: Members of the Queen's University Community

We, the undersigned, wish to state our deep concern over the recent attacks on the principles of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression that have recently occurred at Queen's University.

The unequivocal protection of these principles is crucial to the health and vitality of Queen's University's stated commitment to "develop leaders and citizens for a global society."

BACKGROUND

On March 9, 2011, the Queen's University Rector Nick Day published a "Response Letter to Michael Ignatieff" on the Liberal Party leader's "Statement on Israeli Apartheid Week." The letter expressed the Rector's position regarding Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW), outlining the rationale for its legitimate inclusion on Canadian university campuses as a matter of freedom of speech. At no point in the letter did Rector Day state that he was expressing the official view of Queen's University or of Queen's students as a group.

Only a day after the publication of the Rector's letter, Principal Daniel Woolf issued a public statement expressing his views, declaring that it was "inappropriate" for the Rector to voice his opinions regarding Ignatieff's comments. Principal Woolf stated he was contacted by "students, alumni, and others, who believe the Rector should no longer have the privilege of holding this office." In his public statement, the Principal neglected to reference the messages from current students, alumni, faculty members, and others who had contacted him in support of the Rector and his right to speak publicly on such issues in his capacity as Rector.

Partisan student organizations, including the Campus Conservatives, Queen's Liberal Association, and Israel on Campus, circulated a petition seeking an AMS motion to poll the Queen's undergraduate student body on whether to recommend the Rector's dismissal by the University Council. This petition was presented to the AMS Assembly only one day after the publication of the Rector's letter to Michael Ignatieff.

After receiving defamatory and violent personal attacks, including a death threat, through email, Facebook, and Twitter, the Rector decided not to attend the AMS Assembly. The Queen's Journal reported that he felt "uncomfortable and unsafe." This environment of intimidation -- which Principal Woolf not only failed to address but also exacerbated -- has denied the Rector an opportunity to respond to the controversy prior to or during the AMS Assembly. Following a secret ballot,

AMS Assembly voted to allow the question to proceed to a referendum set for March 22-23, 2011.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM & FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

We believe that the Queen's University community must demonstrate its unequivocal support to upholding a campus environment of unfettered academic inquiry and discussion. Israel Apartheid Week (IAW) provides a forum for the Queen's University community to engage with vital issues of concern to human rights and Canadian foreign policy.

The Rector's response to Liberal Party leader, Michael Ignatieff, addressed common and often dangerous misconceptions with Israel Apartheid Week, an annual week-long event that has been held on Canadian campuses since 2005.

IAW has been held at Queen's University since 2008 and is well attended by faculty, staff, students, and local community members. IAW makes an intellectual contribution to public understanding of Canadian and Israeli foreign policy, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the situation of the Occupied Territories and Palestinian peoples. Further, "Israeli Apartheid" is the subject of an internationally-recognized academic and political debate, one that is actively engaged with here at Queen's.

There is no doubt that IAW is a controversial event, particularly with respect to the use of the term "apartheid." As a leader in higher education and an institution dedicated to global citizenship, Queen's University must not retreat from its responsibility to engage with controversial issues; rather, it is the University's role to create and maintain space for civil discussion, dialogue, and dissent. While IAW events may challenge attendees to reflect critically on their presumptions and beliefs, a process that can be difficult for some, there have been no credible reports of anti-Semitism or targeting and harassment of Jewish or Israeli students during IAW at Queen's.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RECTOR

In publicly addressing the protection of IAW as a matter of Academic Freedom, and Freedom of Expression, the Rector acted in accordance with the duties and responsibilities of the office which requires the Rector to "promote scholarly dialogue amongst students." The countless debates about this and other issues sparked by the Rector's public statements are certainly a testament to the fulfillment of this important mandate.

To suggest that all actions undertaken by the Rector must necessarily represent a consensus of the Queen's University student body is both impossible and

renders meaningless the position of the Rector as an elected representative of students to the Board of Trustees and administration. Any public action or statements made by the Rector, especially those directly relating to matters of academic freedom and discourse, will no doubt may be seen as contentious by some members of the Queen's University community. It would be a frightening compromise of democratic principles if the Rector were to be restricted from acting publicly on matters relevant to student life and academic inquiry, while being expected to espouse institutionally-sanctioned lines in both her or his politics and actions.

We, the undersigned, wish to state the following:

1. We unequivocally support the principles of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression in all circumstances. These principles are critical to the maintenance and vitality of an open and democratic community and must not be constrained in any way by interference from outside powers.
2. Differences of opinion and the motives of partisan political organizations regarding controversial issues are not justifiable grounds for the removal of the Rector from office by the University Council.
3. The position of Rector is accountable to the entire Queen's University student body and not any particular student government or constituency.
4. We urge the Queen's University student body to affirm its commitment to principles of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression by voting "no" on the referendum regarding the recommendation of the removal of the Rector from his position.
5. We condemn the use of hate speech and violent personal attacks in all cases and call on Principal Daniel Woolf to make a clear public statement condemning the use of hate speech and physical intimidation, including those made against the Rector.

Please send your personal statements of support for the unequivocal protection of principles of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech at Queen's University to: academicfreedomqueens@gmail.com