

Wednesday, May 19, 2021

RE: The International Human Rights Program Director Hiring and CAUT Censure

Dear President Meric Gertler,

On behalf of over 131,000 full-time and part-time undergraduate and graduate students at 4 different institutions, we write to you to express our concern and disappointment over the hiring process of Dr. Valentina Azarova and the censoring of human rights and Palestinian advocates. On April 22, the [Canadian Association of University Teachers \(CAUT\)](#) imposed a rare censure against the University of Toronto (UofT) for the clear and inappropriate actions that led to a serious breach of academic freedom. As students who aspire to be academics, instructors, scholars, and teaching staff, as well as students who the UofT's censorship of Palestine has impacted, we agree with CAUT's censure and urge the Administration to rectify this breach.

Students' unions are committed to fighting for an accessible and high-quality post-secondary education system for all. This system requires that academics and instructors are afforded the principles of academic freedom to write critical discourse that adds to our educational experience. The actions of the UofT send a strong message to our members and the academic community that they are at risk of reprisal for their research and advocacy for human rights.

It goes against the University's Freedom of Speech policy as well as its commitment to equity to insinuate that the hiring of Dr. Azarova would bring "irreparable harm" to the institution for the work she has done to highlight the human rights violations in Palestine. The notion that you cannot research, write, or discuss human rights violations is a threat to academics and students, particularly members of the Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and Jewish communities, who feel like these issues are a priority on our campuses. For years, students have been pressured to stay quiet about the oppression and colonization of Palestine, which has been institutionalized in policies by the UofT that impede on events and advocacy. This breach has proven that the censorship of Palestine runs deep within the institution, and this must end.

When an institution causes harm, it is vital to acknowledge its impact, promptly address it and ensure that it does not happen again. We call on the University of Toronto to rectify this situation by:

- 1) Re-offering the position of Director of the International Human Rights Program (IHRP) to Dr. Azarova;
- 2) Issuing a public acknowledgment and accepted responsibility for the factual inaccuracy and misleading assertions found in the Cromwell report; and
- 3) Truly commit to decolonization by divesting from all weapons and arms manufacturing companies that directly benefit colonial states like Israel and contribute to human rights violations.

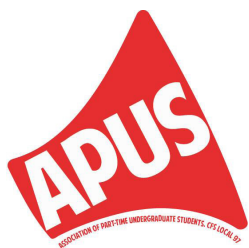
For decades, students have been at the forefront of advocating for social and racial justice. As students' unions across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), we will support the censure and encourage students, academics, lecturers, instructors, and guest speakers to do the same. We will continue to fight for human rights and will vehemently oppose policies and actions by the UofT that attempt to block this.

President Gertler, you have an opportunity now to set an example by humbly acknowledging and rectifying the harm caused to Dr. Azarova, the greater academic community, and communities that are marginalized by colonization and racism. We look forward to your future actions and work to reconcile this issue.

In student solidarity,

Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students (APUS), University of Toronto
Scarborough Campus Students' Union (SCSU), University of Toronto
University of Toronto Graduate Students Union (UTGSU), University of Toronto
University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union (UTMSU), University of Toronto
Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario (CFS-O)
Continuing Education Students' Association of X* (CESAR), X University
Ontario College of Art and Design Students' Union (OCADSU), OCAD University
York Federation of Students (YFS), York University
York University Graduate Student's Association (YUGSA), York University

* Please visit www.mycesar.ca/XUniversity to learn more about the history of Egerton Ryerson and why students are taking action about their University's namesake.



University of Toronto Mississauga
Students' Union
LOCAL 109 OF THE CANADIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS



CESAR

Continuing Education Students'
Association of Ryerson
Local 105 of the Canadian Federation of Students

