August 11, 2024

Difat Jakubovicz, MD

[Personal information redacted – Board Office]

To: Toronto Police Services Board

Re: Public Order Policy Consultation

Dear Board Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on your policy discussions regarding police actions during protests, demonstrations and occupations. I am a member of the Jewish community and a proud Zionist. To clarify the definition of Zionism: Zionism is the right to self-determination of the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland.

Since October 8, 2023, I have watched with increasing discomfort and fear for my safety as a Jewish woman in the city of Toronto, the aggressive and brazen actions of the “Pro-Palestinian” (aka anti-Israel, antisemitic) protesters. Protesters have occupied public spaces, intimidated students on campuses, entered predominantly Jewish neighbourhoods to block roads, and held protests outside Jewish businesses, community centers and places of worship.

While I strongly support the right to free speech and assembly, **free speech does not include hate speech and incitement to violence,** which is unambiguously what is happening on our streets. My concern is also the greater picture of how these protests, here and around the world are disrupting of the ideals of western democracy.

The police must strive to take into consideration the broader context of these protests to find the right boundaries for protesters past which their actions constitute a threat to others. Part of this context is the unique position of the Jewish community in Canada and indeed the world. Jews represent approximately 1% of the Canadian population, yet they experience 70% of all religiously motivated hate crimes. On all measures, Jews are by far the most threatened and harassed minority group in Canada. Jews also carry with them the inter-generational trauma of systemic racism and genocide that was most recently perpetrated on the Jewish people resulting in the decimation of the entire European Jewish community and 1/3 of the world’s Jewish population. In the world, Jews are even a smaller minority, making up about 0.2% of the world population, yet Jews are discriminated against in vast swaths of the world. The Jewish state, Israel, is treated as the Jew among nations. Each year it receives more condemnations in the United Nations than all the other countries combined, despite being a liberal democracy. The supposed legitimacy of attacking Israel has provided a substantial outlet for antisemites who wish to threaten Jews but cannot do so directly. Governments, news organizations, and police forces routinely look the other way when Israel, Israelis, and Zionists (people who support Israel including the vast majority of Jews) are denounced, delegitimized, and threatened.  The word ‘Zionist’ is used instead of ‘Jew’ so people are not charged with hate crimes. If one replaces the word Zionist, with any other minority group, it is clear to see how the hate speech would not be tolerated.

In this context, I would recommend the following policy changes:

1. Greater sensitivity to protests targeting groups with a documented record of hate crimes directed at them. Here we must be careful to find an objective measure that is not easily tampered with to determine who truly requires additional protection.
2. Limit protests to locations where there is a clear policy connection to the cause being protested. For example, you can protest high municipal taxes outside city hall, but not outside my house. Likewise, synagogues and Jewish neighbourhoods have little to nothing to do with the Hamas-Israel conflict and should not be allowed as legitimate locations to protest those issues especially when protesters are not even local residents.
3. Zero tolerance for violence, threats and property damage. Protesters who utter threats, make threatening actions, deface property, vandalize, litter and refuse to vacate private or public property when asked to leave should be promptly arrested and prosecuted. At a minimum, they should be sued for damages to dissuade such actions in the future.

I realize this is a tough balancing act. We rely on our police to protect us from threats, violence, and intimidation, while also protecting everyone’s right to free speech and assembly. I hope this input will help you find the right balance.

Sincerely,

Difat Jakubovicz, MD

Eglinton-Lawrence