

December 4, 2023

Honourable Randy Weekes,
M.L.A.
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan
129 - 2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK. S4S 0B3



PRV 1-29

Tabled by Hon. Mr. Harrison

Date December 6, 2023

Dear Speaker Weekes,

B'nai Brith is Canada's oldest Jewish advocacy organization, nationally active since 1875.

We write today to alert the members of the Saskatchewan Legislature to the deep concerns of the Jewish community regarding the recent demonstration which disrupted the democratic functioning of the assembly's work and during which extremely troubling and antisemitic slogans were chanted by protesters.

On October 7 Israel was the victim of an unprovoked bloody attack by several Palestinian terrorist groups led by Hamas. Thousands of missiles were fired at Israeli civilian targets. Some 1200 Israelis were massacred by the terrorists in what can only be described as a horrific and brutal atrocity.

Moreover 240 people, including many children and elderly persons were taken hostage. Residents of Saskatchewan have joined other Canadians in calling for their immediate and safe return. Canada has stood with the democratic world in condemning Hamas and recognizing Israel's right to defend itself. So has the Government of Saskatchewan.

Yet these protesters felt they had the right to disrupt the democratically elected Legislature to openly vilify Israel, portraying the Jewish state as the aggressor rather than the victim of terrorism.

Instead of abhorring the terror attack, the demonstrators shouted slogans calling for the obliteration of Israel. In particular the phrase "from the River to the Sea" is hateful and calls for Israel to disappear and its territory to be entirely absorbed by a future Palestinian state.

The slogan epitomizes the Hamas manifesto which denies Jewish history, incites vicious antisemitism worldwide and promotes violence to destroy the Jewish state. In practice the slogan "from the River to the Sea" has encouraged acts of terror against Jews in Israel and elsewhere.

.../2



2.

Jews are indigenous to Israel with a history dating back many thousands of years. Jews have always dwelt in the holy land and denying their ancestor there is antisemitic and incitement to terrorism.

The use of this slogan impacts the Jewish community here in Canada. Attached please find our one page informational document describing the pernicious impact this hateful slogan has on our community.

In 1947 Canada joined the large majority of United Nations members in adopting Resolution 181 which recognized Jewish statehood in the land where Jews have always been indigenous. Hamas inherits the legacy of those who at that time rejected the two state solution which aimed to ensure self-determination for both the Jewish and Palestinian peoples. Those refusing the right of the Jews to their own country have been at war for 75 years.

The Abraham Accords which are fostering peace and cooperation between the Jewish people and their Arab neighbours offer a path we can all endorse. The call for the destruction of Israel and the implicit support of violent aims that the slogan “from the River to the Sea” connotes must on the other hand be absolutely rejected and condemned.

B'nai Brith has enlarged its advocacy with the Government of Saskatchewan over the past two years. We are pleased with the seriousness the province gives to combatting antisemitism.

In December 2022 to assist stakeholders better recognize and react to hate aimed at Jews, Saskatchewan adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. The province thus joined the Government of Canada, 40 other nations, five other Canadian provinces and 30 states of the United States in adopting the IHRA definition, recognized globally as the most authoritative definition of antisemitism.

The definition is clear. Criticism of the State of Israel and its government in the same manner as any other nation is legitimate. Calling for its destruction and refusing to acknowledge its legitimate right to exist is antisemitism.

We note that Premier Scott Moe and Opposition Leader Carla Beck have been unequivocal in their denunciation of the use of the hateful slogan by these protesters. We thank them for that.

.../3



3.

However, the Jewish community in Saskatchewan is concerned that Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) may have aided to organize the demonstration which, we understand, is the first time ever that the Legislature has been disrupted and been unable to function.

In particular, news reports carried by several Saskatchewan news outlets suggest MLA Jennifer Bowes shared social media posts promoting the protest and quote her as admitting she was in contact with the protest organizers. A CBC report mentioned that members of the official opposition caucus met with protest organizers on November 14.

Several media quote protester Valerie Zink admitting the following: *"That's what brought us to the legislature today, and the intention was always to deliver that message in that way."*

It is difficult to believe that MLAs who helped facilitate this so-called peaceful protest were unaware that the Legislative session was about to be disrupted.

The event was evidently not spontaneous and required a large number of police and security forces to eject the protesters. Videos and photos available online show angry shouting protesters, efforts to remove the Israeli flag from the Legislature rotunda and a situation that could easily have degenerated to violence.

We do not agree with the quote from MLA Meara Conway made in the Toronto Star that the protest was "a peaceful disruption". The fact that there were no arrests does not make the incident less frightening for anyone not associated with these protesters.

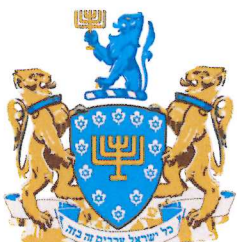
The Legislature has its own rules of functioning and as Speaker you can take the appropriate measures in your rules of procedure, such as barring attendance of any of these protesters from future sessions of the assembly. We are however more concerned with the message certain MLAs have sent to the province's Jewish community.

No MLA should endorse slogans that call for the obliteration of the Jewish homeland.

No MLA should condemn Israel for its right to defend itself.

No MLAs should simply parrot the talking points of terrorist groups that are banned by Canada.

.../4



4.

We invite the Legislature to adopt a clearly worded motion to denounce the unprovoked attacks on Israel and on innocent civilians by the terrorist group Hamas, and affirm the right of Israel to respond and defend itself.

We understand that the Privileges Committee will be meeting later this week. We ask it to ascertain whether and how certain MLAs did in any way facilitate this disruption of the Legislature and allow for the hateful antisemitic "River to the Sea" slogan to be chanted.

Jews have played an important role in the growth and success of Saskatchewan since before Confederation. Jewish farming colonies took root in what is today Saskatchewan as early as 1882. A historic synagogue in Edenburg completed in 1908 attests to Jewish history in the province. Today's Jewish population is primarily urban and continues to contribute to the well-being of the province in so many ways.

Yet the appalling chaotic event at the Legislature has made the entire community feel targeted.

Thank you for your attention to this matter

Most warmly,



Michael Mostyn
Chief Executive Officer
B'nai Brith Canada



Marvin Rotrand
National Director - League for Human Rights
B'nai Brith Canada

Encl.

c.c. Jeremy Harrison, Nicole Sarauer

