

Request from Black intellectuals and students asking Michaëlle Jean to respect censure of the University of Toronto

May 3 2021

To the Right Honorable Michaëlle Jean,

The Canadian Association of University Teachers has taken the rare and serious decision to censure the University of Toronto. CAUT has determined that the University's administration failed "to resolve concerns regarding academic freedom stemming from a hiring scandal in the Faculty of Law". Relying on undisputed evidence contained in a report by Mr. Thomas Cromwell, CAUT concluded that a donor/judge's objections to Dr. Valentina Azarova, based on her scholarship on Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories, influenced the University's decision to rescind an offer of a position as Director of the International Human Rights Program.

The CAUT censure calls on outside speakers to decline speaking engagements at University of Toronto. Since the censure was issued on April 22, the list of event and speaker cancellations has grown. Several newspapers in Canada and abroad have reported on the censure. Human Rights Watch has expressed reservations about the future of its own academic partnership with U of T, advising that "the university's leadership should grapple with the unresolved concerns that the university has compromised its academic freedom" in this matter. The University of Toronto senior leadership's actions in this matter raise doubts about the University's commitment to professional ethics, equity, human rights, transparency and anti-racism, as well as academic freedom.

Ms. Jean, you are scheduled to deliver a lecture at the Faculty of Social Work on May 10, entitled "Seizing the Moment to Build a Movement: A Call to Action to Eradicate Systemic Racial Discrimination". Under these circumstances, Black scholars, intellectuals and students at the University of Toronto and beyond, who are committed to living and working in a society where human rights are respected and institutional racism is condemned, ask that you immediately cancel your May 10 speaking engagement. We ask that Black intellectuals and students, whether public intellectuals or those affiliated with other institutions, not accept speaking invitations to the University of Toronto while the CAUT censure is in place. Even beyond the CAUT censure, we call on the University of Toronto to hold its senior leadership accountable for reforming an institutional culture in which such serious violations of ethics, equity and human rights could take place.

Signatories:

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*List of signatories updated periodically.
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