



September 24, 2020

Dear Meric Gertler,

We write to you as President of the University of Toronto, from Canadian Friends Service Committee, the peace and social justice agency of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada. CFSC conducts all of its work in accordance with Quaker testimonies: simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and unity with creation.

Recently U of T decided to rescind the hiring of Human Rights director, Dr. Valentina Azarova, as Director of the International Human Rights Program (IHRP). Dr. Valentina Azarova is a well-known lawyer and professor who has worked in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. She is an advisor to the UN on fact-finding missions.

The University's decision to rescind its offer of employment to Dr. Azarova appears to be made due to her work on Palestine and Israel, in particular her writing on Israel's violations of human rights.¹ If this is indeed the case, it constitutes censorship and suppression of human rights work and not an action in keeping with the highest standards of academia.

In addition, this is not what the majority of Canadians support. According to a recent EKOS survey, "86% of Canadians disagree with the idea that Canada should overlook Israel's human rights violations just because it is considered to be an ally."²

It is profoundly troubling that the University would rescind a job offer to a respected international human rights lawyer. Dr. Azarova's human rights work is impressive and she would be an internationally recognised asset to the University's IHRP program. Therefore, we urge the University to take immediate steps to reinstate Dr. Azarova and to demonstrate its support for freedom of expression and conscience.

Thank you,

Lana Robinson,
Clerk, Canadian Friends Service Committee

¹ Shree Paradkar, "Search for New Director of U of T Law Faculty's International Human Rights Program Leads to Resignations, Allegations of Interference," *The Toronto Star*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/09/17/search-for-new-director-of-u-of-t-law-facultys-international-human-rights-program-leads-to-resignations-allegations-of-interference.html>

² Independent Jewish Voices, "Survey: Regarding ICC, Canadians Reject Double Standard for Israel," September 16, 2020, <https://www.ijvcanada.org/survey2020-2/>