

The McMaster Peace Initiative

Preamble

The events of February 2008, during “Israel Apartheid Week” at McMaster University, symbolized the increasing tensions among members of the university community around Middle East issues.

It is a given that political turbulence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has an impact on relationships between Jews, Arabs and Muslims in communities like Hamilton. And while it is not our role, nor is it within our power, to directly influence the outcome of that complex dispute, it is certainly within our purview to engage in scholarly discourse that addresses various aspects of the conflict.

What we have termed the *McMaster Peace Initiative* will seek to identify a mutually agreeable framework for such a process.

Moving Forward

Participants acknowledge that while the university campus is a place that supports the free exchange of ideas, unbalanced, inflammatory, or intimidating language has the potential for promoting a chilled academic environment. Nonetheless, the participants acknowledge that students, faculty and staff have the rights to express themselves clearly and stand up for what they believe in. Moving forward, the participants to the McMaster Peace Initiative therefore agree to move towards a process whereby respectful, meaningful discourse can occur. The intention is to engage in forward-thinking debate and deliberation to advance diverse viewpoints in the spirit of inclusiveness and academic integrity.

There is a need for a broad understanding of the issues involved and an acknowledgement that existing frameworks may serve to merely perpetuate current misunderstandings. We need debates that are framed in a scholarly context rather than rhetoric that evokes often counterproductive emotional responses. The university belongs to everyone and, as such, no one should be dehumanized in their own home.

The time has come to establish a viable initiative for constructive discussion.

Therefore, without the intention to limit political discussion and debate, the participants hereby commit to:

1. engage in a balanced and informed discourse that focuses on common interests;
2. create an environment for mutual understanding that promotes peaceful co-existence;
3. pursue robust scholarship that is subject to academic scrutiny and aimed at proposing productive outcomes;
4. contribute to a body of academic work that engenders positive solutions;
5. move beyond the language of demonization and delegitimization;
6. refrain from statements or actions that might have the effect of perpetuating racism of any sort; and
7. set an example for other institutions of higher learning.

Guidelines for Engagement of Scholarly Discourse

The participants further assert that actions that promote harassment, intimidation, discrimination, violence, and hate speech are unacceptable within the McMaster university community. The participants confirm that the acts listed below shall prompt the issuance of a response censuring any such behaviour among members of the campus community.

- The use of hate speech, including statements intended to:
 - i. Publicly incite violence or hatred against an identifiable group when such incitement is likely to lead to breaching the peace;
 - ii. Advocate or promote genocide; or
 - iii. Wilfully promote hatred against an identifiable group;
- Verbal or Non-verbal communication, toward another individual or group of individuals that is considered harassing, threatening, degrading, intimidating, and/or discriminatory;
- The commission of acts toward another individual or group of individuals that is considered assault, harassment, intimidation, or discrimination and/or engagement in physical acts that may endanger the safety of others, or be considered intimidating and/or physically abusive; or
- Damage to property.

The participants also agree that the level of the response issued shall be commensurate with the level of the objectionable behaviour in question.

Example of Proposed Response:

The participants of the McMaster Peace Initiative condemn [*or depending on the level of behaviour, strongly condemn; completely condemn; or publicly disavow*] the use of violence / intimidation / hate speech [*see list of behaviours noted above*] and call on members of the University community to refrain from the commission of such acts that clearly contravene the spirit and intent of respectful discourse.

McMaster University and the participants of the McMaster Peace Initiative uphold the principles of civil discourse, sustained critical debate, and mutual accountability, and insist that all members of the campus community treat each other with respect and uphold the principles of creating an inclusive community.

Interpretation and Implementation

As part of the commitment to uphold the spirit of this initiative, the participants will seek guidance from the Office of Human Rights & Equity Services in the interpretation and implementation of its terms.

Nothing in this document is intended to undermine or detract from McMaster University's policies and procedures, including the faculty and student codes of conduct.

The participants agree that the terms of this initiative may be reviewed from time to time.

Dated this 2nd day of March, 2009 at Hamilton, Ontario.

THE PARTICIPANTS

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