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York University Denounces Acts of Violence at Campus Event

Office of the President

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Last night a York University student group held a scheduled event in a lecture room in Vari Hall that resulted in an organized protest by other groups. A large number of community and non-community members were on site, each expressing their views. The tension was high at times and the groups were in close proximity to one another, resulting in some verbal and physical confrontations. As a result of significant safety planning ahead of the event, York University security services, together with our partners at the Toronto Police Service, were able to manage the situation and ensure the event continued as planned. We are grateful to our staff and TPS officers for their skill and professionalism.

I want to emphasize in the strongest possible terms that acts of violence are not tolerated on our campuses and York University has zero tolerance for hate. There is simply no place for it in our community. Together with York's faculty, staff and students, I am deeply disappointed by the behavior that was on display last night. In democratic societies, universities play a central role in facilitating debate on difficult issues. Shouting, threats of violence and attempts to intimidate community members are not consistent with the responsibilities we all share. The fact that external groups were on campus last night for the sole purpose of fomenting conflict should be especially disturbing to everyone at York.

York believes that community members and guests have the right to express their views provided this expression remains within the limits prescribed by Canadian law. York's [*Statement of Policy on Free Speech*](#) recognizes that free speech is not absolute or without limits. It does not protect any expression that constitutes hate speech, harassment, threats, discrimination or otherwise violates the law. The University will be reviewing last night's events very carefully to determine what specific follow-up actions are required.

I also believe it is essential to proactively develop strategies for fostering a more productive dialogue around these issues. I have therefore asked York's Vice President of Equity, People and Culture and our Division of Students to take the leadership on a strategy, leveraging the expertise of faculty who conduct scholarship in this area. Our Freedom of Speech Working Group, which will be launched very soon, will also be asked to make specific recommendations on how to create a more respectful climate on campus for the discussion of difficult topics.

I hope we will continue to challenge ourselves, as a university and a community, to debate and protest passionately, but to do so with respect for differing points of view and generosity towards our opponents.

Sincerely,



Rhonda L. Lenton,
President & Vice Chancellor

