

AUAFA Statement on Freedom of Expression in Relation to the Middle East Conflict

2024-04-02; amended 2024-04-04

The Alberta University of the Arts Faculty Association acknowledges the deep, irreversible and irreparable losses experienced both directly and indirectly by members of our community in relation to the conflict in the Middle East. In light of a recent increase in students' and faculty's expressions of support for the people of Palestine and a pattern of Universities limiting such expression nationally and internationally, including at AUArts, AUAFA reasserts its commitment to academic freedom, artistic freedom, and freedom of expression. We remind our members of AUArts' [Freedom of Expression Policy](#)—a response to a 2019 mandate by the Alberta Minister of Advanced Education that all publicly funded post-secondary institutions adopt free speech guidelines based on the Chicago principles. In the [University of Chicago's 2014 report](#), the authors state that,

It is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. . . . Although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community. . . .

Although members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campus, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe.

AUArts' Freedom of Expression Policy allows for the restriction of “expression that violates the law, falsely defames an individual, or constitutes a genuine threat or harassment that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality of interests.” AUAFA is likewise committed to protecting members from anti-Palestinian racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia. Simultaneously however, we also [share the position](#) that legitimate criticisms of the State of Israel and Zionism are not inherently hateful or antisemitic*, just as legitimate criticisms of Hamas are not inherently Islamophobic.

AUAFA also directs its members' attention to Article 26: Academic and Artistic Freedom in the [Collective Agreement](#) and Article C4: Statement of Academic Freedom in its [Constitution and Bylaws](#). At a time when many faculty are feeling a need to support, guide, and set an example for students as they are initiated into citizenship—learning to engage in the exchange of ideas, debate, and protest—know that we are also here to support you as faculty. Given all that we as a society now know about mental health and the significance of psychological harm, we also implore you to balance your legal entitlements with respect, patience, empathy, compassion, and curiosity for others and their views.

* see also the [Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism](#)