

January 14, 2025

### **Community Impact Statement: R vs. Hissa Abed**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the court on behalf of Toronto's Jewish community regarding the actions of Ms. Hissa Abed on Sunday, August 18, 2024. On that day, Ms. Abed brazenly grabbed an Israeli flag out of the hands of a citizen participating in a peaceful and solemn gathering, an unprovoked and hateful act of aggression that violated the citizen's right to assemble and express himself freely and without fear.

This weekly vigil and Jewish gathering has taken place at the Bathurst and Sheppard intersection every Sunday since October 7, 2023, serving as a platform for the Jewish community and allies to mourn the 1,200 innocent souls murdered and the 251 hostages taken by Hamas on that day. Participants gather to hold Israeli flags and display pictures of kidnapped or murdered victims in an atmosphere of peace, unity, and solemn remembrance. Ms. Abed's actions disrupted this gathering, causing distress to those present and undermining a space dedicated to collective mourning and solidarity.

The Israeli flag waved at these gatherings represents much more than national identity; it is a symbol of grief, resilience, and remembrance for the Jewish community. The forceful removal of this flag by Ms. Abed was not only an affront to the individual involved but also an act that unsettled an entire community still grappling with the horrors of recent events. Such acts are especially harmful because they embolden prejudice, foster division, and undermine the fundamental principles of respect and equality that underpin our liberal democracy. For many Holocaust survivors and their descendants in this neighbourhood, this action rekindled painful memories of persecution and the denial of their right to live freely and proudly.

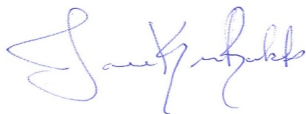
This incident has reverberated throughout our community. Many Jewish individuals who were already feeling vulnerable amid rising antisemitism in Canada now feel further marginalized. For this to occur in such a significant and sacred space for the Jewish community adds to the emotional and psychological toll on those who call this area home. Ms. Abed's actions have deepened fears about the ability to safely express our identity and beliefs in public spaces. When one community's right to free expression is threatened, the democratic freedoms of all Canadians are at risk.

As a society, we must hold accountable those who seek to intimidate or silence others through acts of hate. The Jewish community urges this Court to send a strong message that such behaviour is unacceptable in a just and democratic society. While we believe in the principles of justice and rehabilitation, we also believe that the sentence must reflect the seriousness of this offence and its impact on the broader community.

We hope Ms. Abed will reflect on the harm caused by her actions and take steps toward understanding the values of inclusivity and respect that are essential in a multicultural society like ours. It is our sincere hope that this incident serves as a moment of learning for her and a reminder to all that hate and intimidation have no place in Canada.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for considering the perspective of the Jewish community.

Respectfully submitted,



Jaime Kirzner-Roberts  
Sr. Director, Policy & Advocacy  
Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center