

**York University
Faculty Association**

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Open Letter to SSHRC President from York University Faculty Association

June 16, 2009

Dr. Chad Gaffield

President, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

350 Albert Street, P.O. Box 1610

Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 6G4

Re: Review of SSHRC Funding for Conference at York University: "Israel/Palestine: Mapping Models of Statehood and Paths to Peace"

Dear Dr. Gaffield:

The York University Faculty Association (YUFA) joins Canadian Association of University Teachers, Osgoode Hall Faculty Association and the administration at York University in expressing our extreme dismay that SSHRC appears to be acceding to political pressure by revisiting its decision to fund the above-noted academic conference.

YUFA's Executive deplores the threat to academic freedom and to the integrity of arm's-length assessment. According to SSHRC's announcement, the context of this request was SSHRC's post-award procedures. However, SSHRC's post-award procedures specify that a grant holder must request approval before a conference is held only if there are major changes to the conference (e.g., its theme or focus). Nowhere do SSHRC's post-award procedures say that SSHRC itself will proactively second-guess the organizers of a conference for which SSHRC has already provided a grant. We believe there is no basis at all for the suggestion that "major changes" were made to the plan for this conference after the grant application had been peer reviewed and funding granted. Nor do we believe that you could possibly see any basis for this suggestion. Rather, it appears that the special accounting was demanded of our colleagues in direct response to the unprecedented and entirely inappropriate political intervention of Minister Goodyear.

YUFA's Executive believes that SSHRC's request for such information at the 11th hour calls into question the integrity with which SSHRC follows its own procedures for arm's-length peer assessment and accountability. YUFA Executive also deplores SSHRC's request as damaging to the good-faith relationship that has obtained between SSHRC and Canada's university scholars and--most seriously--a threat to their academic freedom.

We hope that SSHRC will very shortly stand up to defend its own granting procedures and the values of academic excellence and autonomy they are designed to protect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arthur Hilliker'.

Arthur Hilliker

President, York University Faculty Association

