

Meric Gertler President University of Toronto
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Dear President Gertler and Dean Brunnée,

Re: CAUT Censure of UofT for Cancelling the Hiring of Professor Azarova

I am the Global Director of The Shift, an international human rights organization, and the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, a post I held between 2014 and 2020.

I attended UofT Law School and was one of the first students to complete a combined LLB/MSW between 1990 – 1994. I am an [alumni of the International Human Rights Law Program](#). In fact, I was the first student of that programme to do a human rights internship in Palestine with the Palestine Human Rights Information Centre, thanks in no small part to the efforts of Professor Cook who convinced the Faculty of the merits of such an internship.

In my role as UN Special Rapporteur I had a close working relationship and partnership with the IHRP. For approximately 4 years, IHRP students provided research assistance to me for my biannual thematic reports which I presented to the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. On several occasions IHRP students attended the Council to experience the UN human rights system first-hand and to assist in preparations for my Interactive Dialogue with member States. The IHRP also provided me with summer interns on several occasions. The IHRP was fundamental to my success as a UN Rapporteur, and I have been told by students as well as the former Director, that working with me and my team was a very positive learning experience.

As a human rights lawyer I have always felt it was important to stress the universality of all human rights, for all people, particularly because my work focuses on socio-economic rights which are commonly ignored and because I advocate for the human rights of Palestinians – a group for whom human rights advocacy is particularly difficult to undertake in current political contexts.

I was startled and deeply disturbed to learn of the revocation of an offer of employment to Professor Valentina Azarova by the Law School, because of her human rights scholarship on Israel and Palestine – scholarship that is consistent with international human rights law.

The Dean's decision was inconsistent with the very human rights principles and values upon which the IHRP was presumably based, and it was a decision that undermines academic freedom. I also felt it was a decision that derails the work I and others undertook to ensure the IHRP was responsive to student interest in projects regarding the protection of human rights of Palestinians.

In February 2021 I was approached by Professor Rebecca Cook to participate in a review of the IHRP – prior to the release of Judge Cromwell's findings. I responded that I would be happy to discuss with Professor Cook and Dean Brunée, the impact of the Azarova hiring situation on my ability to engage the program as a human rights advocate, director of an international human rights organization and alumni of the programme. I suggested my position might be representative of others. I also indicated that in my opinion any review of the program would necessarily have to focus on rebuilding the reputation of the IHRP. Professor Cook replied to my offer by indicating that my input for the review was no longer being solicited.

In light of these events, I took the decision with my team that The Shift would not engage in a partnership or work with the IHRP. We have since taken the decision to observe the CAUT's censure of UofT: we will not be undertaking any speaking engagements, appointments or collaborative activities at UofT until Professor Azarova receives a formal apology and is extended an offer of employment.

I look forward to your timely response and in the meantime I intend to make this letter public.

Yours Sincerely,



Leilani Farha

Global Director, The Shift
Open Society Foundation, Fellow (2020-2022)
London School of Economics, Global Faculty, Executive MSc in Cities
Former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing (2014-2020)