

# Organized campaign of violent threats and intimidation against Canadian Palestinian activists: The case of Ghada Sasa

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As US and Canadian imperialism steps up its backing for Israel's genocide in Gaza, Palestinian activists in Canada face an unprecedented and escalating campaign of violent threats, smears and demonization. This campaign originates at the highest levels of the Canadian imperialist state.

On December 14, Liberal MPs Anthony Housefather, former Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino, former Attorney General David Lametti, Ben Carr and Anna Gainey attempted to initiate a witch hunt campaign on Canadian university campuses to silence, intimidate and slander anyone expressing solidarity with the Palestinians.

Taking his cue from the witch-hunt underway on US campuses, Housefather deployed the filthy smear that demands for a democratic Palestinian state 'from the river to the sea' were tantamount to calls for the "genocide" of the Jews. This reverses the real situation, in which Israeli and US officials are calling for, and carrying out a genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza.

The MPs addressed an "open letter"—really a threat—to the presidents of 25 Canadian universities, demanding they "say whether calling for a genocide against Jewish people or the elimination of Israel violates their school policies." But nobody is calling for genocide against Jewish people. This fraud is designed to compel university administrators to silence any opposition to Israel's genocide against the Palestinian people, and to remove from their posts any administrators who refuse to shutdown protests and censor students.

The brunt of this campaign is being born by Palestinian activists such as Ghada Sasa, a McMaster University PhD student studying how Israeli environmental policies are integrated into its policy of occupation.

Since the beginning of the Israeli genocide in Gaza, Sasa, an outspoken defender of the Palestinian people's right to resist, has become a target for institutional supporters of Israel's genocidal policy. These include the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, B'Nai Brith Canada, and Allied Voices

for Israel, whose director smeared Sasa as an "antisemite" and demanded that Sasa be dismissed from her position at McMaster in a December 13 *National Post* article.

This official witch-hunt atmosphere has also emboldened fascistic individuals to threaten Sasa with violence. Her case is an example of the treatment being meted out to anyone who dares to stand up to the ruling class and their imperialist war.

Sasa has courageously exposed some of the most egregious and violent threats she has received on her Twitter account. On December 4, British Columbia-based "management consultant" Brad Atchison messaged Sasa on Facebook, despite having no common friends or contacts, to declare that Sasa deserved to be raped—because of her outspoken defence of the Palestinians' right to resist genocide and Israel's illegal occupation.

Atchison also declared that Sasa "should have your butt punted out of Canada. If you are a Canadian citizen, you should have your citizenship stripped." Such racist, anti-immigrant ravings saturate the social media statements of the same layers who supported the far-right "Freedom" Convoy against public health mandates in 2022, and who now support the leader of the Federal Conservatives, Pierre Poilievre.

Demands for the expulsion of Palestinians and Muslims from Canada are being promoted by the far-right tabloid *Toronto Sun*, the right-wing *National Post*, and the fascistic Rebel Media. They all declare that antiwar, pro-Palestinian demonstrators do not share "Canadian values."

It should come as no surprise that efforts to smear and politically isolate Sasa and anyone who defends Palestinians were legitimized at the outset by the trade union-backed New Democratic Party, which is propping up a federal Liberal government that is waging imperialist war abroad and class war at home.

The Ontario NDP's expulsion from the Ontario legislature caucus of Hamilton Centre MPP Sarah Jama on October 23,

for her refusal to denounce the Palestinian uprising of October 7, helped create the political atmosphere for the far-right campaign now in full swing. Official NDP support for Jama's censure by Ontario's far-right Conservative Government made it clear that no assistance would come to Palestinians or their supporters, even elected ones, from any faction of the capitalist ruling class. From there on, it has been "open season."

Two days later, Sasa and her brother Khaled were physically attacked by security guards while peacefully protesting for a cease fire at the Federal NDP convention, which occurred in Jama's riding in downtown Hamilton. The assault was captured on video.

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site*, Sasa related what occurred: "We were chanting and then all of a sudden, this one guy, he literally had me in a chokehold. And I was trying to get free. They were also tackling my brother. I don't think any of that was legal. We were never aggressive. We were there to peacefully protest, and they were there to block and assault us. MP Heather McPherson, who is supposed to be an ally for the Palestinian people, said that we had made people feel unsafe through our peaceful discussion. The NDP were trying to argue that they didn't call the police on us, but I don't know if I believe that. There were 11 police cars outside of the building."

It should be noted that MP McPherson is also an outspoken supporter of the Ukrainian far right.

On October 19, Sasa participated in a radio interview, in her former capacity as a board member of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) with the right-wing "Real Talk" radio show host Ryan Jespersen. Sasa was brought onto CJPME's board in 2022 to provide it with more "authentic" Palestinian representation. The organization's treatment of Sasa and events in Gaza have exposed CJPME's tokenism, and its cynical equation of Palestinian resistance with Israeli violence as politically bankrupt.

In her radio interview, Sasa attempted to explain the situation faced by her own family in the village of Madama in the occupied West Bank. But Jespersen was not really interested to hear that.

Jespersen was only interested in Sasa to the extent that she condemned Hamas, and thus serve as a political prop for those seeking to delegitimize Palestinian resistance to genocide, and to blame the victims of genocide for the allegedly "unforgivable sins" of October 7. Jespersen was further outraged by Sasa's correct statement that the IDF was responsible for hundreds of Israeli deaths on October 7. Multiple investigations by Israeli and international media have confirmed that Sasa was entirely correct.

Speaking separately with the WSWs, Sasa described the

situation faced by the Palestinians of Madama. "I've already lost 46 family members, murdered in Gaza and in the West Bank They're vulnerable to daily pogroms. The settlers are taking advantage of the eye of the world on Gaza to try to colonize more of our land, assault and even kill Palestinians. The villages have Facebook pages to alert people about what's going on. I'm looking at it now as we're talking. There's an incursion right now as we're talking. I'm seeing right now there's a jeep rolling through our streets."

In response to the radio interview, CJPME director Thomas Woodley, a former staffer at the US White House Office of Management and Budget, took a line not dissimilar to that of the right-wing radio host. He called Sasa and demanded that she remove any reference to CJPME from her Twitter bio, and sent the entire board a list of restrictive conditions for future media engagements, explicitly drawing an equals sign between the genocidal violence of the Israeli state, and the resistance of the Palestinians to it. According to Sasa, Woodley was also concerned that the assault on Sasa at the NDP convention would somehow reduce CJPME's influence with Canada's social democrats.

On October 24, the CJPME suspended Sasa from her role on the Board.

The atmosphere of intimidation is also being expressed in daily social interactions. Two days after three Palestinian university students in Vermont were shot because they wore the keffiyeh, Sasa and her brother Khaled were stopped and harassed by security guards at Toronto's Scotiabank Arena while on their way to a Mariah Carey concert simply because they were wearing Palestinian keffiyehs and carrying a sign showing Santa Claus holding the Palestinian flag.

Security guards came up with multiple reasons why the keffiyeh and sign were not allowed, from being "too political" to the sign being "too large." When Ghada and Khaled refused to remove them, police were called. "I was fully frisked. The police had their body cameras on and we were treated with an extremely aggressive and rude manner. They didn't let us in till we took off our keffiyehs," Sasa said.



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