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Melissa Lantsman, M.P. - Thornhill

June 17, 2024

Dear Members of Council,

First, thank you to Mayor Del Duca for this member's resolution to protect Vaughan's places of worship, and thank you to every member of council who has put their support behind this resolution.

I fundamentally believe in the right to protest. It is a central tenet of our freedoms as Canadians - freedoms that I want to safeguard and protect. There is, however, a difference between the right to protest and the right to intimidate. While everyone should have the right to express their views on a variety of issues, no one should have the right to harass others simply because of their religion, their background, or any other right protected by-law.

That is what we witnessed in Vaughan just a few months ago as one of the largest synagogues in the country, in our community was targeted by the anti-Israel mob. The intention of these protests was clear in their choice of location. There is no Israeli embassy, consulate or government office in Thornhill, and if these belligerent activists really wanted to make an anti-Israel statement, then they would have done so in one of the above stated appropriate locations. Instead, they chose to make an anti-Jewish statement. These protests were explicitly designed to put fear into the hearts of our Jewish neighbours, to chip away at their freedom of religion and expression by targeting one of the biggest Jewish communities in Canada at a place of worship.

As leaders, we must ensure that everyone can worship safely. That everyone can do so without fear. That means synagogues, but it also means mosques, temples, churches, and other places.

I want to stress again that I fully believe and support Canadians' right to protest, even if I strongly disagree with the cause they're protesting. But I do not support Canadians' right to block other Canadians from entering a place of worship, to intimidate their neighbours, and to participate in outright acts of hatred. I think this proposed by-law achieves balancing both views - ensuring *both* freedoms of assembly and religion are protected.

I'm pleased to support this motion and I want to thank the city's leadership, the YRP, and everyone else who continues to do the hard work to protect places of worship of all stripes in every corner of the city. This proposal is just one more tool to ensure that safety is protected, and I'd like to thank you the council for what I hope will be its swift adoption.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa Lantsman".

Melissa Lantsman, MP
Thornhill