

Appendix 23: email from Cohen to Shoukri/Monahan re populating the audience at the conference, April 15, 2009



"Cohen, Marshall"
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>

04/15/2009 03:41 PM

To Mamdouh Shoukri , <lawdean@osgoode.yorku.ca>

cc

bcc

Subject Fw:

After a sleepless night fretting about the mapping conference, I prepared the comments you see below. This is more intrusion than I am usually guilty of, but I care and I am concerned. Hopefully I am all wet, but just in case.... We are fighting both maybe a little reality and a lot of (mis)perception. As always, the what to do is your decision. And there are probly a dozen more or better things that you can up with. Anyway I finally decided to send it to you both so we can have a more focussed discussion later to-day Do what you think is best, just don't shoot the messenger

Sent from my BlackBerry Wireless Handheld

From: Cohen, Marshall

To: Cohen, Marshall

Sent: Wed Apr 15 10:41:40 2009

Subject:

Preparatory to our discussion, I thought I wld try and summarise what I perceive to be the situation.. Bottom line is that I think there is a gathering storm out there and I think we need to prepare for it. This situation worries me far more than recent events, but coming on top of recent events, it has tsunami proportions. If I sound a little panicky, it's because I am—not my normal style but there it is. Hopefully, I am all wrong about this.

First, what am I hearing in the Jewish Community:

This is a biased, Israeli bashing, one state solution, verging on anti-semitic conference.

[You have heard this too]

The moderate organizations in the community will soon start their campaigns to reach our parents, donors etc etc

The more extreme groups will march and protest [JDL, maybe B'nai Brith]

This is different than recent events—IAW was every universities problem, the Ferman incident was unexpected. This conference we blessed, we know it's coming and we are letting it happen. This is a York event.

This is another Durban in the making and York will forever be tagged with it

From those who care about York,- this conference is bad news in and of itself, but on top of recent events, it will be a disaster. York will never re-establish itself as a place where Jewish students can be comfortable. Moreover, if there are protests etc, then we will have unleashed a media circus a la Concordia. Regardless of what gets said inside the conference, the "riots" become the story and our reputation gets battered. Finally, the credibility of the Task force comes into question because the conference is an Osgoode affair and Patrick is common to both

So what to do.

First, some principles:

We should not defend the indefensible. By this I mean that you guys shld get really

comfortable that the conference is what it purports to be. I think you shld speak to Adelman, Abella and any one else who might have insight from the Israeli perspective to understand whaty the concern is and whether it has any basis.

Second, we should defend the defensible, once you are comfortable that the conference is being misunderstood.. By this I mean that we shld get very proactive and try to defuse the situation. Freedom of speech and academic freedom are essential to what we are

Here are some thoughts of my own. They may be non starters and they will certainly be met w a 1000 objections, but I wld ask you to measure them against the tsunami alternative that may await us. We are between a rock and a hard place and managing and mitigating the risks is all we can do.

1] I wld seriously consider moving the venue off campus. If this blows up on us then it occurring on campus will overwhelmingly exacerbate the impact on York. There are lots of "reasons" we can come up with to justify the decision

2] You need to met w the Jewish community leadership to carefully explain our position

3] maybe you shld offer the community the opportunity to put forward some speakers of their choice [subject to your approval] to "balance" the program -if indeed the program is biased

4] ensure that there will be no "Durban" style resolutions or conclusions

5] can we populate the audience with observers &/or participants to ensure a balanced dialogue

6] we need to manage the press coverage—can we pre-prepare the ground

7] get your crisis manager involved now—do they have any bright ideas

All these ideas have a price tag attached but the alternative may be even costlier.

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