

Bradford library accused of censorship after axing film screening



[Michael Owen](#)
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Tell Bradford West Gwillimbury Public Library to Not Censor Palestinian Voices



Started March 9, 2024
Petition to Licinio Miguelo (Chair, BWGPL Board) and [3 others](#)

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1 / 3 This screenshot from Wednesday, March 13, shows the petition from Simcoe County 4 Palestine asking the Bradford West Gwillimbury Public Library to reschedule the cancelled screening of the film 200 Meters. | Screenshot

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The Bradford library's decision to cancel a screening of the film *200 Meters* is facing some backlash.

The group Simcoe County 4 Palestine launched an [online petition](#) on Monday, March 11, asking for the film screening to be rescheduled, after the library put out a statement earlier that day announcing the screening was cancelled.

As of early Tuesday afternoon, the petition had almost 700 signatures. In it, the group claims the cancellation "silenced the voices of Palestinian people," and is "an act of anti-Palestinian racism."

The film is a fictional drama about a Palestinian man named Mustafa, whose wife and children live in two Palestinian villages in the West Bank which are 200 metres apart and separated by the Israeli boarder wall. After Mustafa's son is taken to hospital and Mustafa is unable to cross through a checkpoint to see him, the father makes the decision to hire a smuggler to bring him across, which transforms the 200-m distance to his son into a 200-kilometre journey.

Mike Speers, an organizer with Simcoe County 4 Palenstine, said he was "very disappointed" by the cancellation.

"Denying the Palestinian voice, it not only silences one important perspective, but it kind of elevates another and perpetuates a narrative that supports one side," he said. "This kind of censorship isn't good for anybody."

The film was originally scheduled to be shown in the Zima room on Sunday March 17, from 2 to 4 p.m., and in their statement the library explained staff were contacted "a few months ago," by a resident who was interested in hosting an event "intended to build understanding from a Palestinian perspective and help combat rising Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism."

However, the library said the event was cancelled "out of an abundance of caution for the safety of participants and all library patrons."

In response to a request for clarification, deputy chief executive officer Nina Cuniff said that while there have been "no explicit threats to public safety," the library received concerns that "the film screening could cause attendees and library patrons to feel unsafe."

"It was a difficult decision to cancel the screening but we did so out of an abundance of caution to ensure our facility remains a safe space for all," Cuniff said via email. "We will work with local community groups and organizations to develop programming that encompasses broad perspectives and ensures that all feel safe and welcome."

The timing of the cancellation coincided with another [online petition](#) with 359 signatures, which was launched on March 8 by a resident group calling themselves Jewish Bradford Association, who announced Tuesday their "victory" in having the screening nixed.

As part of their reasoning, the group claimed in their petition that the screening "may inadvertently incite anti-Semitic sentiments" and a representative of the group identifying themselves only as Marianna said it would "provoke violence," "sow division," and "stoke the fires of hatred."

Marianna also conceded via email that "the movie itself is not anti-Semitic," but when contacted by phone for an interview, she refused to provide her last name and eventually asked that her comments from the interview not be published.

The library did not address those specific claims in their response, but Speers took issue with them.

"They're equating a Palestinian movie with violence and I think that's racist, and it has no place in our community," he said, adding those who oppose showing the film are "afraid of people learning the truth."

While he understands the library was under pressure to cancel the showing, Speers also feels the library isn't upholding their principles.

"Things like freedom of expression and cultural diversity — that's what we expect from institutions like a library," he said. "We should be able to get together and watch a film and discuss it and learn."

Having watched the film, Speers said there's "hardly any violence," and said it shows "the accurate situation," under which Palestinians live.

A post announcing the screening on the library's Facebook page received 89 comments, almost all of which contained positive responses in favour of showing the film, which actually won the Human Rights Jury Prize at the 2021 Atlanta Jewish Film Festival, according to the Atlanta Jewish Times.

"People were looking forward to it," Speers said. "Efforts to cancel it — that's what's sowing division in our community, and that's what's really tragic here."

Simcoe County 4 Palestine started in October 2023 to support and advocate on behalf of Palestinian people by organizing rallies, protests and educational events. While numbers fluctuate, Speers said the group currently has about 25 core members. For more information, visit their [Facebook page](#) or email simcoecounty4palestine@gmail.com.

The petition in favour of rescheduling the screening can be found at [Change.org](#).

Marianna explained the Jewish Bradford Association only began recently and does not yet have contact information available or a governance structure in place, but clarified that they are not affiliated with [Jewish Bradford](#).

Rabbi Yosef Nakkar of Jewish Bradford declined to provide comment.

The library did not respond to a further request for comment in response to claims made by Simcoe County 4 Palestine.

While *200 Meters* is not physically part of the library's catalogue, a partnership with the educational streaming service Kanopy allows users to watch the film by signing in with their library card.

Further details can be found by visiting the library's website, [bradford.library.on.ca](#).

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