



# Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms

December 31, 2019

*Via Email (presidents.office@ubc.ca) and Facsimile (604-822-5055)*

Professor Santa J. Ono, Ph.D.  
President and Vice-Chancellor  
University of British Columbia  
7th Floor, Walter C. Koerner Library  
1958 Main Mall  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

Dear Dr. Ono:

**RE: Cancellation of Andy Ngo Talk at UBC – Request to Reinstate Event**

We write on behalf of The Free Speech Club at the University of British Columbia (“UBC”).

The Free Speech Club organized an event entitled “Understanding ANTIFA Violence” featuring journalist Andy Ngo at UBC’s Robson Square campus on January 29, 2020 (the “Event”). The Event booking was confirmed with UBC via contractual agreement and The Free Speech Club paid the requisite booking deposit.

In December 2019 however, the UBC Executive unilaterally cancelled the Event without any prior notice to The Free Speech Club (the “Decision”). On December 20, 2019, Ron Halton communicated UBC’s Decision to The Free Speech Club, stating “[t]he reason for the cancellation is the concern about the safety and security of our campus community”. No specific concern was mentioned. If UBC had safety concerns, it did not communicate them to The Free Speech Club or make any efforts to address such concerns. Rather, UBC cancelled the Event outright.

The Decision is unreasonable. It is an alarming betrayal of the foundational pillar of higher education – the freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression. Furthermore, it signals automatic acquiescence to the “heckler’s veto”, which will embolden threats from those who oppose the very notion of free expression.

UBC publicly states that “[u]niversities play a central role in providing a forum where ideas can be expressed, debated, and challenged, and where participants can gain insight and greater mutual understanding.”<sup>1</sup> Dr. Andrew Szeri, Provost and Vice-President, Academic, at UBC, makes the application of this principle clear:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://academic.ubc.ca/support-resources/freedom-expression>

UBC must be an open forum where members of the university have the freedom 'to engage in full and unrestricted consideration of any opinion'.<sup>2</sup>

UBC's *Statement on Academic Freedom* warns that the suppression of this freedom, including by "officers of the University", "would prevent the University from carrying out its primary functions."<sup>3</sup>

We urge that UBC not abandon one of "its primary functions" of "providing a forum where ideas can be expressed, debated and challenged". Concerns for safety and security must be addressed in accordance with Canada's rule of law as a free and democratic society.

Freedom must not be sacrificed to fear.

We request that UBC act immediately to reinstate the Event. Please respond no later than January 10, 2020.

Failure to reinstate the Event will necessitate legal recourse.

Sincerely yours,



Marty Moore  
Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms

cc UBC Board of Governors

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<sup>2</sup> <https://academic.ubc.ca/support-resources/freedom-expression>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3.33.86.0>