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Message from the President: Taking Action Toward Inclusion

York University's 7th annual [Inclusion Day Conference](#) is taking place on January 27, 2016, and I encourage you to attend. Diversity and inclusion are foundational values of our University, so it is fitting that we dedicate a day to reinforcing those values. By embracing our diversity—whether in terms of personal characteristics such as race, religion, gender, gender identity, and ability, or in terms of political or social views—we also embrace the necessity to be inclusive, tolerant and respectful of our differences.

As one of the most diverse universities in North America, York has a deep and rich history of providing expertise and support to finding solutions to societal problems in the world around us. We are a community where inquiry is nurtured and theories are tested; where differing opinions can be presented irrespective of their popularity. Indeed, as a large, comprehensive university, we play an important role in supporting broad inquiry and debate around key societal issues.

Equally important is the recognition that our steadfast commitment to the free expression of ideas does not mean that one can say anything, anywhere, anytime. The University has a very clear position: expressions or actions that discriminate against an individual's or group's ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, age or disability are both illegal and contrary to the values of York University. Similarly, behaviors that threaten the safety of community members or that disrupt academic activities are prohibited.

To be truly inclusive, we must each be aware of how our behavior affects other members of our community. We must accept the responsibility to demonstrate civility and respect for the dignity of others, most especially when disagreements arise. Tactics designed to intimidate, silence or exclude those with opposing views are not tolerated by the University and should not be tolerated by individual members of our community, our student groups and governments. Meaningful dialogue is dialogue with empathy.

As Prime Minister Trudeau said in a speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos this week, affirming Canada's positive, inclusive vision of society, "We need societies that recognize diversity as a source of strength, not as a source of weakness. [...] Diversity isn't just sound social policy. Diversity is the engine of invention; it generates creativity that enriches the world. [...] And yes, we can embrace diversity and the new ideas that spring from it, while simultaneously fostering a shared identity and shared values in safe, stable communities that work."

It is clear that our future will be shaped by how successfully we embrace our diversity and plurality. I appeal to every member of our community to foster an environment that embraces respectful dialogue and upholds the rights of all our community members to work and study in a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment.



On the part of the University as a whole, York's Centre for Human Rights has developed and offers [workshops](#) covering a variety of topics, including Inclusive Teaching Practices, Respect in the Workplace, LGBTQ/Positive Space, Race and Ethnicity, and Sexual Violence Prevention and Response.

Further, we continue to prioritize community safety. We have recently hired an Executive Director of Community Safety, [Samina Sami](#), whose role is to bring members of our community together to develop a proactive, integrated strategic approach to community safety that includes practices and policies specifically relating to women and trans people, concerns about the physical environment and violence prevention. The Community Safety Department is guided by the value of inclusion.

Inclusion Day provides us with an opportunity to recommit to what inclusion truly means; not just in principle, but in lived, tangible action. It is an opportunity to reflect on how we can better live and support York's values of inclusivity and diversity.

I encourage you to take this time to consider what you can do to make our campuses welcoming and approachable for everyone—spaces where we value and embrace global perspectives and cultural differences, and where we work to engage all communities in collegial dialogue to support ongoing diversity awareness and cross-cultural knowledge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'mshoukri', with a small dot at the end.

Mamdouh Shoukri
President and Vice-Chancellor