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## AAO Response to Conflict in Israel and Gaza

December 4, 2023

The Board of Directors of the Archives Association of Ontario (AAO) is heartbroken at the violence in Israel and Gaza. We are deeply saddened by the loss of life in the region over recent months and express our immense grief for any of our members who are affected or have lost family members or friends.

The AAO is part of a network of provincial, territorial, and national archives associations. Though the events in Gaza and Israel may seem removed from the AAO's [Communications and Advocacy mandate](#) to support archives and archivists in Ontario, we have heard from members and feel it is important to support the AAO membership in condemning the ongoing loss of life and cultural heritage.

As one of our members pointed out, the AAO states that archives are “vital to the fair, transparent, and equitable operations [...] of society as a whole.” When mass destruction of cultural heritage occurs in the world, we feel it is important to state what we know as archives professionals: cultural heritage (tangible or intangible) is a vital reflection of communities and collective experience. The effect of the loss of cultural and documentary heritage is particularly concerning during times of conflict. This loss is irrevocably catastrophic to communities and individuals - their memory, their connections, and their history - and this cultural heritage loss extends to archives communities globally. The International Criminal Court defines the destruction of cultural heritage, as has occurred in Gaza, a [war crime](#).

So what can be done? What can be said? What impact can the AAO have in writing this letter, adding to the calls for a sustained humanitarian ceasefire, continued release of hostages, and condemning antisemitism and Islamophobia in all forms?

The AAO Board of Directors urges our membership to:

- Support our colleagues in archives, library and museums impacted by the conflict through collaborative projects, sharing of resources, and statements of solidarity; including considering donations to the following organisations:
  - [Humanitarian Coalition](#)
  - [Blue Shield International](#)
  - [Muslims In Canada Archives](#)
  - [Jewish Heritage Centre](#);
- Work to highlight voices of marginalised communities through acquiring, showcasing, and making accessible resources relating to those communities within our collections;



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- Actively safeguard our collections and archival practice from the effects of colonialism and continue learning about the power dynamics within our profession.

As Krista McCracken has written:

[T]he act of record keeping and the creation of archives are human activities that need to be understood in relation to their power-laden and contextually situated practices... Archival work is directly connected to what (and whose) stories are remembered, accessed, and told. For historians committed to reconciliation and doing the work of speaking truth about the past, it is imperative that the role of archives in collective memory is understood... Historians and archivists must look for what is said as well as what is not said, as archival silences often speak to larger power dynamics and values.<sup>1</sup>

In closing, we ask that our membership be respectful and empathetic to one another, our patrons, and our institutional and association colleagues as we collectively navigate and support each other during this conflict and the long-lasting effects that it will have on our communities in Ontario and abroad.

Sincerely,

The AAO Board of Directors, 2023-2024

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<sup>1</sup> McCracken, K. (2019). Challenging Colonial Spaces: Reconciliation and Decolonizing Work in Canadian Archives. *Canadian Historical Review*, 100(2), 182–201. <https://doi.org/10.3138/chr.2018-0033>