

MAUT statement on peaceful assembly on campus

15 March 2024

In an email dated March 8, 2024, the McGill President announced that the University administration will not “tolerate any interruption or interference with McGill’s operations as a result of protests.” The University, he continued, “will strictly and quickly apply the [Operating Procedures Regarding Demonstrations, Protest and Occupations](#)” and if protesters do not comply with instructions issued by McGill Security, the University “will request police intervention.”

(1) MAUT is concerned about potential police violence on campus.

We recall that previous interventions (notably on November 10, 2011) by Montreal riot police, armed with shields, batons and pepper spray, led to serious physical violence against McGill community members, documented in a [report](#) by former Dean of Law Daniel Jutras.

(2) MAUT is concerned that the President's reference to police intervention in response to disruptive protests is capable of unduly deterring university members from engaging in protest and civil disobedience that constitute legitimate avenues of democratic contestation.

Historically, university campuses have been important sites of democratic contestation. Student activism and student protest have been instrumental in bringing about major domestic and international democratic change on issues such as women’s rights, sexual and gender equality, civil rights, anti-discrimination, anti-apartheid, decolonization, environmental protection, and peace.

(3) MAUT considers peaceful protest and civil disobedience to be potential sites of teaching and learning.

MAUT recognizes that protest and civil disobedience involve difficult trade-offs between the rights and freedoms of several constituencies. Nonetheless, we believe that participating in and encountering these forms of political engagement offers important lessons for our students and the McGill community at large.

(4) MAUT rejects an unqualified right to a campus without disruption and calls for moderation and restraint in the University’s response to disruptive protests.

MAUT therefore calls on the President and the senior administration to moderate their communications and to exercise the utmost restraint in escalating their reaction under the [Operating Procedures Regarding Demonstrations, Protests, and Occupations](#).

MAUT believes that a certain degree of inconvenience arising from protest must be tolerated and that the administration should avoid calling the police unless protesters use physical force, threats, harassment, or other forms of assault.

Given the uncertainty and concern caused by the President's message, MAUT calls for a review of the [Operating Procedures Regarding Demonstrations, Protest and Occupations](#), which were adopted more than a decade ago.

MAUT Council