



May 13, 2024

To the TJFF community:

I want to express my sincere appreciation to the Toronto Jewish Film Festival (TJFF).

The TJFF serves as a vital platform for promoting understanding, dialogue, and appreciation of Jewish heritage and identity, so it's no wonder that the festival kicks off in Jewish Heritage Month. The work the TJFF has been doing to bring Jewish stories to the public has been important since the festival's debut in 1993. However, the TJFF is especially relevant and necessary in a post October 7th Canada. As we're seeing anti-Jewish hate spread in our streets and in our schools, we need art and culture to bring a wider understanding of the Jewish community to Canadians, now more than ever.

Film has the potential to create emotional connections through storytelling. These stories can create a deeper connection to their subjects, showcase the diversity of the community, and lead to cross-cultural understanding that will help combat the antisemitism we're seeing each and every day.

My team and I have been focused on education; we are impressed with the important work going on across Canada, teaching young people about Jewish culture and history, including the history of the Holocaust, in the hopes of stopping antisemitism before it starts. Knowledge inspires young people become better global citizens. The TJFF's FilmMatters program is an invaluable resource to bring Jewish stories to life; these films have the power to spark curiosity, further learning, and healthy dialogue that is so desperately lacking right now.

I also want to acknowledge the tireless efforts of everyone involved in bringing the festival to fruition, from the organizers and programmers to the volunteers and sponsors- even in the face of adversity. Your passion, creativity, and unwavering dedication make the TJFF not just an unmissable event, but a cultural landmark that enriches the fabric of our community.

In these dark times of uncertainty and division, the power of film to unite, inspire, and provoke meaningful conversations is more important than ever. As you continue your work in shaping the cultural landscape of Toronto and beyond, please know that you have my full support and gratitude.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to excellence and for championing the transformative potential of cinema. I wish you a successful opening night on May 30th, and I look forward to witnessing the continued success of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival for many years to come, in what will hopefully be less turbulent times.

With warmest regards,

Deborah Lyons

Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism