March 18, 2021

To the UTM community,

I write in a spirit of sympathy and anger.

On March 16, a man shot and killed eight people in Atlanta, Georgia, including six women of Asian descent. The attack represents only the most recent example of violence against people of Asian ethnicity across North America and around the world. In 2020 alone, in major American metropolitan cities, anti-Asian and anti-Pacific Islander hate-crimes have increased by 150 per cent. In Canada, as data from Fight COVID Racism indicates, the country has witnessed more than 925 reported incidents of anti-Asian racism since the onset of the pandemic last March. I join UTM in mourning the people murdered in Atlanta and in condemning a past and present history of violence exemplified once again.

In response, I wanted to share a message of sympathy, solidarity and strength, echoing a powerful call that Professor Neda Maghbouleh sent to her students yesterday. “To UTM students, colleagues and community members of Asian descent,” as Professor Maghbouleh wrote: “I stand with you in grief, sadness and righteous anger—in this pandemic and beyond. To students, colleagues and community members who are not of Asian descent: please join me in committing to serve as allies and advocates in our shared battle against anti-Asian racism and violence.” Our sympathy must lead to change.

I know that people are hurting, both from news of the Atlanta murders and from a centuries-long history of anti-Asian violence, exacerbated in the past year. Students can speak to a counsellor 24/7 in multiple languages on My SSP through an app and toll free number: 1-844-451-9700 inside North America; 001-416-380-6578 outside North America. Students can also reach out for support to offices on all three campuses, including the Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Office at UTM. For UTM staff and faculty, I encourage you to use the resources available through the Employee and Family Assistance Program: please call 1-800-663-1142.

Thank you.

Alexandra Gillespie
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