

IHRA'S 2016 WORKING DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

**INTERNATIONAL
HOLOCAUST
REMEMBRANCE
ALLIANCE**

In the spirit of the Stockholm Declaration that states: “*With humanity still scarred by ...antisemitism and xenophobia the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils*” the committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial called the on the IHRA Plenary in Budapest 2015 to adopt the following working definition of antisemitism.

On 26 May 2016, the Plenary in Bucharest decided to:

Adopt the following non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

To guide IHRA in its work, the following examples may serve as illustrations:

Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for “why things go wrong.” It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.

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- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective – such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Antisemitic acts are criminal when they are so defined by law (for example, denial of the Holocaust or distribution of antisemitic materials in some countries).

Criminal acts are antisemitic when the targets of attacks, whether they are people or property – such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries – are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Jewish or linked to Jews.

Antisemitic discrimination is the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others and is illegal in many countries.

“FIVE KEY FACTS ABOUT THE IHRA DEFINITION”

Additional Commentary (not originating with IHRA)

1. IHRA's Definition is Rooted in International Consensus

IHRA is not the first forum to affirm the importance of defining antisemitism. In 2005, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) published a working definition of antisemitism. In 2010, the Inter-Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Anti-Semitism (ICCA), a cross-partisan body of individual parliamentarians, developed the Ottawa Protocol which referenced a similar definition.

The IHRA definition builds on these initiatives. Having been adopted by various governments around the world, the IHRA definition now serves as the international standard for defining antisemitism. Shortly after its publication, the Government of Canada endorsed the definition as a pillar of its efforts to promote freedom of religion abroad. As noted on the website of Global Affairs Canada: *“Canada strongly supports the working definition on antisemitism and illustrative examples.”*

To date, the working definition has been adopted and endorsed by the following governments and jurisdictions: the United Kingdom (12 December 2016); Israel (22 January 2017); Austria (25 April 2017); Scotland (27 April 2017); Romania (25 May 2017); Germany (20 September 2017); Bulgaria (18 October 2017); Belgium (14 December 2018); Lithuania (24 January 2018); Republic of North Macedonia (6 March 2018); the Netherlands (27 November 2018); Slovakia (28 November 2018); Republic of Moldova (18 January 2019); Czech Republic (25 January 2019); Greek Ministry of Education (11 February 2019); Hungary (18 February 2019); France (20 February 2019). In 2017, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling on member states and institutions to adopt or apply the IHRA definition.

2. The IHRA Definition is Necessary to Address the Changing Nature of Antisemitism

The IHRA definition reflects a consensus among scholars that a new type of antisemitism has emerged post-Holocaust, in the form of hatred of Jews presented under the guise of hostility toward Israel and/or Zionism. (For clarity, the Oxford Dictionary defines Zionism as *“a movement for [originally] the re-establishment and [now] the development and protection of a Jewish nation in what is now Israel.”*)

Historically, antisemitism has consistently adapted itself to social, political, and intellectual trends and conditions. For example, among some Christians in the Middle Ages, it took the form of charges of Jewish deicide. As nationalism grew in 19th Century Europe, it evolved into claims that Jews were a separate nation that threatened the nation-states in which they lived. As the false science of eugenics gained traction in the early 20th Century, Jews were portrayed as racially inferior.

Today, scholars widely acknowledge a new form of antisemitism in the form of hatred against Israel, the world's only Jewish state. Where Jews were once vilified as individuals and a collective, today the Jewish state is vilified by some – often using terminology and conspiracy theories that mirror historic antisemitism. That anti-Zionist ideology and accusations are often presented in the language of human rights does not exempt them from scrutiny. As noted above, antisemitism has always used the highest values of the era as cover for legitimacy.

To put it in simpler terms, as Martin Luther King Jr. once remarked when responding to a critic of Zionism: *“When people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews, you are talking antisemitism.”* (Source: Seymour Martin Lipset, Encounter Magazine, December 1969).

“FIVE KEY FACTS ABOUT THE IHRA DEFINITION”

Additional Commentary (not originating with IHRA)

3. The IHRA Definition is Not a Law in Itself

The IHRA plenary resolution explicitly states, and IHRA repeatedly notes, that the working definition is non-legally binding. As noted in the text itself, antisemitism may be criminal depending on the circumstances, but the definition captures both criminal and non-criminal forms of antisemitism.

Aspects of the text also clearly confirm that it is a pragmatic – and even flexible – “*working*” definition, rather than a rigid formula. For example, the preamble to the list of illustrative examples states: “*Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to...*” (emphasis added).

For Canadian domestic purposes, it should be viewed as a practical tool for authorities to use in fulfilling their mandates as they pertain to antisemitism.

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5. The IHRA Definition Balances Free Speech and Protection from Hate

The IHRA definition offers parameters and real-world examples to distinguish antisemitic rhetoric from legitimate political discourse. The very guidelines that help illuminate what may be considered antisemitic also clarify what cannot be viewed as antisemitic. In so doing, IHRA has made a substantial contribution not only to the battle against hate, but also to the cause of upholding free speech. The same parameters that will guide authorities in holding accountable those who peddle antisemitism will also help exonerate those who engage in legitimate discourse from false or erroneous accusations.

As the definition notes, criticism of Israel on par with that directed against other countries cannot be viewed as antisemitic. Just as Canadians criticize the policies and decisions of our elected leaders, Israelis and others freely criticize the democratically elected government of Israel. The effort to counter hatred is only undermined when legitimate political discourse is curtailed.