



## **What Antisemitism is not, and Why it Matters**

Organized campaigns are derailing and mis-stating the meaning of antisemitism and falsely conflating it with criticisms of Israel and Zionism. This tactic, used by opponents of Palestinian rights over the years, has become intensified as the movement for justice has grown.

### ***We must be very clear:***

Criticizing Israel for its actions and policies is not antisemitic.

Criticizing a nation-state-any nation-state-for its discriminatory and racist practices, ideology, and policies is not antisemitic.

In fact, in our quest for justice—which includes our fight against antisemitism—we must oppose all forms of injustice.

## **Accusations of Antisemitism**

False charges of antisemitism take different forms, including house resolutions; congressional hearings of university presidents; and ongoing efforts to criminalize and penalize those speaking out in their schools, universities, workplaces, and communities against Israel's ongoing violence. High school students have been suspended for hanging Palestinian flags in their school (including when there are Israeli flags); parent leaders who have called for a ceasefire have been victims of campaigns to push them out of their positions; and teachers have been investigated for demanding that school officials recognize Israel's violence against the Palestinian people in public statements or for simply teaching Palestinian history. We are also witnessing the illegal abduction and attempted deportation of protestors without U.S. citizenship, threats to university funding and to the ability of universities to function without severe government interference, and increased crackdowns on campus activists.

Someone may feel uncomfortable with a particular political position, but that is very different from being unsafe. We can be sensitive to someone's feelings, and engage with them, while at the same time, be extremely careful that we are not crowding out,

demonizing, or devaluing the Palestinian message and experience or falsely calling that message—which reflects a commitment to rights, liberation and justice—antisemitic. We must be very clear as we oppose actual antisemitism that criticism of Israel and Zionism are not forms of antisemitism.

False accusations of antisemitism cause great harm to Palestinians and other seekers of justice. In addition, it also derails the fight against actual antisemitism and pits struggles for justice against one another when they should be, and are, deeply connected. Therefore, we need to be vigilant not to allow any community—Muslims, Black people, Palestinians, Jews, trans and queer people, immigrants, and others—to be denigrated by those whose agenda is to deny the rights or the humanity of any people or community. That is the opposite of collective liberation.

*“... the word (antisemitism) matters because it is heavy with history, echoing with the sound of shattering glass. As a result, it is not only a difficult word but a dangerous one, for it is a word that can do harm if it is misused. Yes, it is a label that we need, a name for something that needs naming and denouncing. But a label can turn into a libel when it is pinned on the wrong lapel. Antisemitism has rightly been called a ‘monster’. But false accusations of antisemitism are monstrous too. For all these reasons and more, the word matters a great deal.”*

**-Brian Klug "What do we mean when we say 'antisemitism'?" Opening, Antisemitism in Europe Today: the Phenomena, the Conflicts; Jewish Museum Berlin.**

## **IHRA and the Distortion of what Antisemitism is**

In recent years, defenders of Israel have urged universities, governments, and others to adopt a definition of antisemitism promulgated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA-WDA). The IHRA definition is not designed to clarify what antisemitism is, but, rather, to conflate antisemitism with criticism of Israel or Zionism. In fact, the IHRA definition includes eleven examples of antisemitism, seven of which specifically focus on the State of Israel, and not on Jews. Those who are pushing for the IHRA definition are doing so in order to silence and penalize critics of Israel’s human rights abuses. It should be noted that states have been urged to adopt a legislative definition of antisemitism, while never proposing a definition of any other form of racism.

*“The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which is increasingly being adopted or considered by western governments, is worded in such a way as*

to intentionally equate legitimate criticisms of Israel and advocacy for Palestinian rights with antisemitism, as a means to suppress the former. This conflation undermines both the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality and the global struggle against antisemitism. It also serves to shield Israel from being held accountable to universal standards of human rights and international law.” - [40+ Jewish groups worldwide oppose equating antisemitism with criticism of Israel](#)

“In recent years, the fight against antisemitism has been increasingly instrumentalised by the Israeli government and its supporters in an effort to delegitimise the Palestinian cause and silence defenders of Palestinian rights. Diverting the necessary struggle against antisemitism to sever such an agenda threatens to debase this struggle and hence to discredit and weaken it.” - [Group of 122 Palestinian and Arab academics, journalists, and intellectuals, “Palestinian rights and the IHRA definition of antisemitism”](#)

“By falsely conflating anti-Zionism—a form of legitimate political discourse and belief—and antisemitism—a form of ethno-racial hostility and hatred—and calling it ‘new antisemitism’ and codifying it in the form of the IHRA ‘working definition’ of antisemitism, antisemitism has been redefined to be what it is not...nThe conflation is false because, first, the root concept of ‘new antisemitism’, that Israel is the ‘collective Jew’ among the nations, is a myth—a state cannot have the attributes of a human being. Second, it is a heretical corruption of Judaism because it entails an idolatrous deification and worship of the state...” - [Antony Lerman, Whatever Happened to Antisemitism](#)

“Antisemitism—hatred, violence, intimidation or discrimination targeting Jews because of their ethnic and religious identity—is rampant and deadly. Despite the clear threat of anti-Jewish rhetoric and attacks from white supremacists, however, many Israel lobby groups have instead focused on redefining antisemitism to include criticism of Israel.”  
-[Palestine Legal](#)

Those who are pushing for this definition of antisemitism to be adopted by universities, governments, and others are attempting to silence and penalize critics of, and those protesting, Israel’s violence and human rights abuses against the Palestinian people.

Israel’s assault on Gaza has prompted widespread criticism across the globe, and, in response, defenders of Israel’s actions have mobilized leaders of the political, business, and academic communities to label such criticism antisemitic. False charges of antisemitism have been hurled at protesters and those standing up for justice, and those speaking out have been silenced and penalized at their workplaces and in their educational settings and have endured punitive and repressive

measures. To be clear, these actions being called antisemitic are about criticism of Israel—not criticism of Jews. And there are many more examples.

In addition to the IHRA, the inaccurate and false charges of antisemitism are also wielded in other ways to shut down protest and political dissent.

We see this in the Heritage Foundation’s [Project Esther](#), a proposal claiming to lay out a plan to combat antisemitism in the US. Nothing in the document will actually protect Jews. Rather, its aim is to destroy the Palestinian movement for justice and to use those attacks to sharpen repressive tools that can be used for silencing all dissent and dismantling civil society and democracy more broadly.

## Use and Misuse of Data

When an organization falsely considers criticism of Israel or Zionism as antisemitism in their data, the results will necessarily be skewed and inaccurate (this is the exact [critique](#) of the Anti-Defamation League’s methodology and data—that is, that it has included pro-Palestine, pro-justice actions in its data of what constitutes antisemitism). When looking at data, it is crucial to understand the source, who is creating the data, for whom, and to what end. Sheryl Nestel from Independent Jewish Voices Canada (IJV), describes this well in [this](#) short video clip.

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The “[Curriculum on Antisemitism from a Framework of Collective Liberation](#)” is devoted to understanding and challenging antisemitism grounded in a deep commitment to justice and dignity for all people. The sessions are geared toward universities and middle schools/high schools, social justice and community-based organizations, foundations, religious and cultural institutions, and others. PARCEO has created a series of hand-outs drawn from the curriculum.

*This hand-out is excerpted from the curriculum.*

PARCEO is available to facilitate 1, 2, and 4 hour workshops or classes in your school or community. Please reach out to us at [antisemitismcurriculum@gmail.com](mailto:antisemitismcurriculum@gmail.com).