



What Antisemitism is NOT:

International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA-WDA)

[Organized campaigns](#) are putting forth definitions of antisemitism that derail and misstate the meaning of antisemitism and falsely conflate it with criticisms of Israel and Zionism. This tactic, employed by opponents of Palestinian rights over the years, is used to attack advocates for Palestinian justice and has become intensified as the [movement for justice has grown](#).

I. International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA-WDA)

The misstating of what antisemitism is furthers political goals that are harmful to our work for justice, including that of ending antisemitism. We hone in here on one of the main ways that criticism of Israel and Zionism is equated with antisemitism (and what those with this view call the 'new antisemitism'): through the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA-WDA).

The [IHRA definition](#) includes 11 examples of antisemitism, including 7 that are not about antisemitism but are about criticism of Israel. Those who are pushing for this definition to be adopted by universities, governments, and others are attempting to silence critics of Israel's human rights abuses.

To read about the history of the IHRA, efforts to codify it, impact, and pushback, go to [Distorted Definition: Redefining Antisemitism to Silence Advocacy for Palestinian Rights.](#) by Palestine Legal.

II. Impact of IHRA

Support for Palestinian rights and justice is consistent with support for challenging antisemitism—in fact, they are both part of intersecting struggles for justice. Falsely calling criticism of Israel antisemitism harms Palestinians, weakens the fight against antisemitism, and is contrary to a commitment to collective liberation.

Excerpts from articles on IHRA and what is/is not antisemitism:

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA-WDA) puts forth a definition of antisemitism that includes in its description examples that are not about antisemitism but about criticism of the State of Israel.

- *“The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA-WDA) is designed to silence criticism of Israel and of Zionism by equating this criticism with antisemitism. Yet since antisemitism is a type of racism, it must be opposed in solidarity with other anti-racist struggles.”*
—Independent Jewish Voices
- *“...Finally, 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, Center for Research on Antisemitism at the Technical University Berlin, the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility, and Future, and the Jewish Museum Berlin
- *“Just as with the legendary boy who cried ‘wolf’ when there was no such predator in sight, these false claims of antisemitism are dangerous. They harm Palestinians and those who research and advocate for Palestinian rights. And they can leave us all vulnerable when the real beast of anti-Jewish racism bares its fangs.”* —Abigail B. Bakan, Rebecca Comay, and Deborah Cowen
- *“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 serve such an agenda threatens to debase this struggle and hence to discredit and weaken it.” –122 Palestinian and Arab academics, journalists, and intellectuals. “Palestinian rights and the IHRA definition of antisemitism”

- *“So under what conditions does a passion for justice become renamed as antisemitism? It cannot be that the only way to refute the charge of antisemitism in these debates is to embrace injustice, inequality, and dispossession. This would be a cruel bargain indeed.” –Judith Butler (Jewish Voice for Peace). Foreword, p. X. *On Antisemitism Solidarity and the Struggle for Justice*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017.*
- *“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...” “The 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? Redefinitions and the Myth of the ‘Collective Jew*. Pluto Press, 2022.*
- *“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 be easily adopted or considered by western governments 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.” – First-ever: 40+ Jewish groups worldwide oppose equating antisemitism with criticism of Israel*
- *“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](#)

- *“The governmentality of the new antisemitism thesis has fostered, and has been fostered by, a racial imaginary that centres on a particular psychosocial type of the ‘anti-Semitic Muslim’, which has become one of the metaphors of the parallel societies and the hermetically sealed, tribal, non-integrated identities supposedly fostered by multiculturalism. In this context, the fight against new antisemitism, as a power-knowledge field, has played a role in delegitimizing what has increasingly become defined as the ‘ideology of multiculturalism’, taking along with it the agendas of anti-racism and the promotion of human rights. It has enabled the increasing convergence of liberal and right-wing agendas around anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant platforms” –Esther Romeyn, ‘(Anti) “New Antisemitism” as a Transnational Field of Racial Governance’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 54, no. 1–2 (14 March 2020)*
- *At the end of the day, defining antisemitism does not actually do the work of dismantling antisemitism. Legislating a static definition for any particular form of bigotry weakens our efforts to combat discrimination across different contexts and over time. Lawmakers who truly seek to combat antisemitism must commit to dismantling it at its roots, alongside all forms of oppression and bigotry* Dismantle Antisemitism, Not Palestinian Rights: Oppose the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism. [Jewish Voice for Peace Action and Palestine Legal](#)
- [Video](#): Being precise about what antisemitism is and what it is not, excerpt from PARCEO Roundtable (7 minutes), with Aisha al-Adawiya, Andrew Kadi, Sheryl Nestel, Rebecca Vilkomerson (2023)
- Differentiating between antisemitism and what is called antisemitism. *“There’s antisemitism and there’s “antisemitism” (in quotes). The first is something we all have a responsibility to fight against, and the second kind of needs a new word to indicate the weaponization of the accusation of antisemitism to suppress Palestinians and their critiques of Israel...”* – Rebecca Vilkomerson, excerpt from PARCEO Roundtable with Aisha al-Adawiya, Andrew Kadi, Sheryl Nestel, Rebecca Vilkomerson

III. What to consider when challenging attempts to bring the IHRA definition into our communities:

- A. Make clear what IHRA entails—what it is, and what it isn't.
- B. Make visible who is pushing for this definition, why they are calling for a definition that conflates criticism of Israel with antisemitism, and whose interests it is serving.
- C. Reiterate that IHRA has little to do with challenging antisemitism and all to do with thwarting the movement for Palestinian justice.
- D. Stress the benefits to everyone of challenging antisemitism in the context of justice and dignity—and collective liberation—for all.
- E. Look critically at the data being presented on antisemitism and where it is coming from.

IV. Data in relation to how antisemitism is defined

“How data on antisemitic incidents is interpreted rests fundamentally on how antisemitism is defined. Since 2016, there have been vigorous efforts by pro-Israel Jewish organizations worldwide as well as Israeli governmental bodies to persuade governments and civil institutions to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA WDA)... What renders the definition controversial is the inclusion of eleven examples of antisemitism, seven of which define strong criticism of Israel as antisemitic... These examples reflect the view, propounded in the early 1970s by supporters of Israel, that vigorous opposition to Israeli policies toward Palestinians, constitutes a “new antisemitism” understood as a continuation of centuries of Jew hatred rather than as a political response to evidence of widespread Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights.” –Sheryl Nestel, (forthcoming) Antisemitism Education forthcoming; Encyclopedia on social and political movements in education

“The misapplication of what antisemitism is requires us to look more carefully at the data on antisemitism. When an organization, like the [Anti-Defamation League \(ADL\)](#) falsely considers criticism of Israel as antisemitism in its data, the results will necessarily be skewed and inaccurate. When looking at data, it is crucial to understand the source, who

is creating the data, for whom, and to what end.” – [Curriculum on Antisemitism from a Framework of Collective Liberation](#)

“B’nai Brith Canada cannot be understood as a neutral source for reporting on the nature and scope of antisemitism in Canada. It has both a political and a financial interest (its fundraising relies largely on its positioning as the premier opponent of antisemitism in Canada) in touting increases in antisemitism. Of course, that alone does not make its Audit suspect. But there are serious criticisms that can be leveled against the Audit itself and against B’nai Brith’s specific claims about antisemitism in Canada. Chief among these are: inclusion of expressions of criticism of Israel as incidents of antisemitism, complete lack of methodological transparency, obfuscation of evidence of low levels of antisemitic sentiment among the Canadian public, and disregard of evidence of the attitudes about antisemitism of Canadian Jews themselves.”

-Sheryl Nestel

<https://www.ijvcanada.org/the-use-and-misuse-of-antisemitism-statistics-in-canada/>

V. Among the many resources to support learning and taking action to challenge the IHRA

- [Independent Jewish Voices #No IHRA](#)
- [Palestine Legal Backgrounder](#)
- [Curriculum on antisemitism from a framework of collective liberation](#)
- [JVP Action, Pal Legal Dismantle Antisemitism, not Palestinian Rights](#)
- [IMEU Explainer on IHRA](#)

*This handout is drawn from PARCEO’s Curriculum on
Antisemitism from a Framework of Collective Liberation.
antisemitismcurriculum.org*