

## Problems with the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism

[The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism](#) (JDA) is a definition of antisemitism that was developed over the last year by a group of academics. Its stated aim is to serve either as an alternative to the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism or as a clarification tool to help interpret the IHRA Definition.

The JDA defines antisemitism as “discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish).” Similar to the IHRA Definition, the JDA includes a set of guidelines for its use.

Some of the JDA’s language could potentially be helpful as a complement to the IHRA Definition. However, other sections are deeply harmful, as they serve to dismiss concerns about various forms of antisemitism rather than empowering Jews and others to stand up to this hatred.

### **Many of the JDA’s claims against the IHRA Definition and antisemitism are misleading and harm efforts to combat antisemitism.**

- The main differences between these two definitions are found in the examples related to Israel. The JDA’s stated aim is to clarify confusion and controversy and it provides specific guidelines attempting to define what can and cannot be considered antisemitic. Unfortunately, these statements do not reflect the lived experiences of the majority of the Jewish community<sup>1</sup> and can easily be taken out of context or misinterpreted. Instead of providing clarification, this runs the risk of creating more confusion and controversy.
- The IHRA definition provides eleven examples rooted in antisemitic conspiracy theories, with the acknowledgment that these have evolved over time and will continue to evolve. These examples allow for education to better identify antisemitic manifestations and provide for the context to be taken into account in investigating whether antisemitism has occurred. The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism best reflects how contemporary antisemitism **can** manifest across the political spectrum. It is called a working definition because it is intended to be used, i.e., “worked with,” allowing for continued investigation and consultation with those affected by antisemitic language and acts.
- Ironically, the JDA claims that the examples included with the IHRA Definition put “undue emphasis” on Israel-related antisemitism (despite the reality that much contemporary antisemitism is, in fact, related to Israel) but asserts that disproportionate, excessive and unreasonable criticism of Israel is not necessarily antisemitic. Again, such a claim is far more likely to muddy the waters than to provide clarity when addressing Israel-related antisemitism.

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<sup>1</sup> Luntz Global, “American Jews on Israel and the Middle East,” *CAMERA*, May 16-17, 2011, at [http://www.camera.org/images\\_user/pdf/luntz.camera%20poll.results.final.pdf](http://www.camera.org/images_user/pdf/luntz.camera%20poll.results.final.pdf)

- The JDA erroneously claims that using a double standard not applied to other countries when speaking of Israel is not antisemitic. While each instance needs to be judged case by case, there is no question that such discriminatory double standards do exist. For example, the UN Human Rights Council has passed dozens of anti-Israel resolutions and barely any condemning other nations.
- The JDA also claims that boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel are not necessarily antisemitic. This assertion is likely intended to create confusion about the antisemitic nature of the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement against Israel. The true aim of BDS is not to protest Israeli policies as some claim, but to isolate and pressure Israel until it collapses as a Jewish and democratic state.<sup>2</sup> Ninety-four percent of American Jews would consider it a tragedy if Israel no longer existed tomorrow and 71% of American Jews totally oppose the encouragement of BDS activity across the U.S. and Europe<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, to claim that BDS cannot be considered antisemitic does not represent the views or lived experiences of the majority of American Jewry.
- By claiming that evidence-based criticism against Israel--like claims of settler-colonialism and apartheid--cannot be considered antisemitic, the JDA is contradicting itself, as such claims are NOT born out by the weight of evidence. Denying 3,000 years of Jewish identity and connection to Israel and ignoring that Israel is a diverse democracy where all citizens are equal under the law is misleading and inaccurate. These claims only serve to demonize Israel, Israelis, and Jews, which is antisemitic.
- The JDA also improperly claims that opposing Zionism is not antisemitic. Zionism is properly understood as the desire of the Jewish people to exercise the right to self determination in their ancestral homeland (a right enshrined in international law), and many, if not most, Jews view Zionism as integral to their identity. It is indeed antisemitic to hold the expectation that this right to self determination should be supported and afforded for everyone except the Jewish people. Additionally, when people mendaciously claim that they only oppose Zionists, not Jews, the impact is equally harmful.

**The JDA prioritizes intent over impact when it comes to determining whether antisemitism has occurred.**

- This can actually cause more confusion and further the spread of antisemitism, as it allows people to shield themselves from being called out for using antisemitic rhetoric simply by claiming they did not mean to promote antisemitism.

**The JDA claims to be a consensus-driven definition because it was developed by legal scholars and members of civil society over the past year.**

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Moor, "BDS is a long term project with radically transformative potential", *Mondoweiss*, April 22, 2010, at <https://mondoweiss.net/2010/04/bds-is-a-long-term-project-with-radically-transformative-potential/>

<sup>3</sup> Luntz Global, "American Jews on Israel and the Middle East," *CAMERA*, May 16-17, 2011, at [http://www.camera.org/images\\_user/pdf/luntz.camera%20poll.results.final.pdf](http://www.camera.org/images_user/pdf/luntz.camera%20poll.results.final.pdf)

- The JDA does not have consensus from those affected by antisemitism. When it comes to defining antisemitism, there is a much stronger consensus in the Jewish community supporting the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism.

**The JDA's focus is too narrow.**

- Unlike the IHRA Definition, the JDA limits antisemitism's targets to Jews and Jewish institutions. The IHRA Definition rightly recognizes that even non-Jews may be the targets of antisemitic bias. For example, if a non-Jew perceived as supporting the state of Israel had her home vandalized, for example with an anti-Jewish message, because of that perception, this could be considered antisemitic under the IHRA Definition. Or, if a Christian congregation known to have expressed support for Zionism were attacked in some way because of this expression of support, this could be considered antisemitic under the IHRA Definition.

**The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism is the international consensus-driven definition of choice.**

- The IHRA is an intergovernmental agency first established in 1998 and comprised of 34 member countries as an assembly of international experts and governments. The IHRA Working Definition is based on a definition first published by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in 2005, now the Fundamental Rights Agency. The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism was developed and adopted following extensive research and consultation. This IHRA committee worked to build international consensus around this working definition of antisemitism by consulting with international experts and leaders of the organized Jewish community. In 2016, the working definition and its list of examples was adopted by a plenary meeting of the 34 countries in the IHRA. Since then, this definition has been adopted by leading Jewish organizations fighting antisemitism around the world, over 30 governments, and a growing number of organizations and institutions.
- The IHRA Definition does not rely on or account for intentions in consideration of whether antisemitism has occurred. Whether or not one intends to engage in antisemitism is not the determining factor as to whether certain substantive words or actions are, in fact, antisemitic. The IHRA Definition allows for antisemitism to be identified as such, without regard to motive or intention. This allows for better education to take place, including when antisemitism occurs but was not intended, as is often the case.
- While all struggles against racism and oppression are connected and deserve our attention, each one is unique as well. The need to speak out against other forms of bigotry does not diminish the importance of addressing the specific, recurring hatred experienced by the Jewish people. The IHRA Definition does this by focusing on educating specifically about antisemitism's many manifestations and modern adaptations.

## Sources

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